ries of Life, Love and

tember
916
CTS.

Adventure

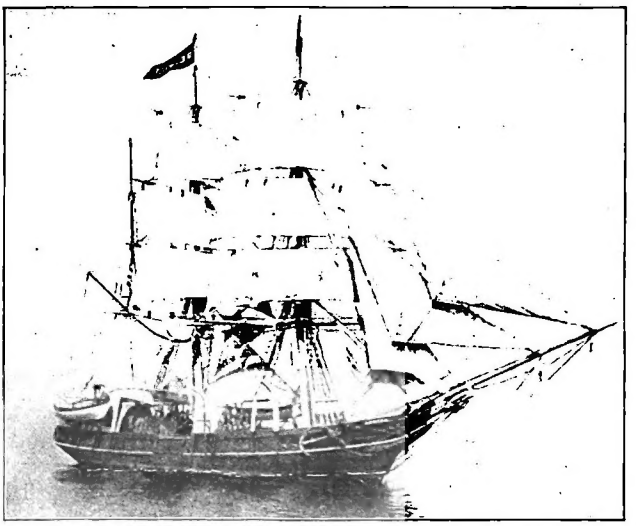
THE UNIVERSITY
OF TEXAS
5 1943
RARY

"THE
CRET WOLF"
Complete Novel
f Canada by
arleton

C. Tuttle
psburg Liebe
tes Glen
H. Hurst
threne and
Pinkerton
ul H. Harris
thur D. Howden Smith
land Ward Peck
nry Martel Gwynn
o. Warburton Lewis

A Serial of
he Ancient World

Digitized by Google



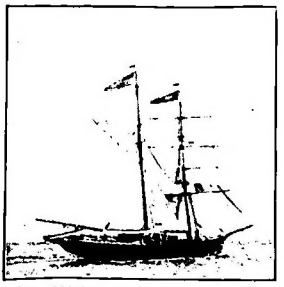
The *Bertha* has on her old clothes, so to speak, as the patched sails attest.

The royal and to'gallant-s'ls of this famous old bark, *Morning Star*, are furled, and her courses are hauled up.

SOME FAMOUS WHALERS

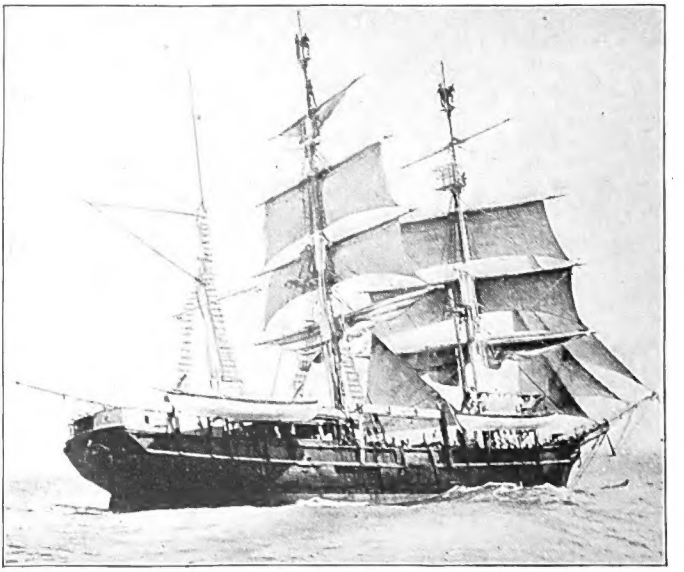
THESE stanch old vessels have nosed into more uncharted waters and strange harbors, perhaps, than any others afloat. Their day is passing. Yet a few still cruise the old whaling-grounds, adding each year to the rich romance of the sea. These photographs are by Stephen Allen Reynolds, an *Adventure* writer, who has spent months aboard whalers.

The *Arthur V. S. Woodruff*, first three-masted whaling schooner.



The *Viola*, outward bound on the starboard tack.

The *Wanderer* has for years been one of the most persistent enemies of the whale family.



The bark, *Andrew Hicks*, cruising on the Hatteras Grounds with double lookouts posted at her two crow's-nests. Circular bands of iron and wooden foot-rests answer for crow's-nests in warm waters.

Digitized by Google

Vol. 12 **Adventure** No. 5

Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, President — GEORGE B. MALLON, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second-Class Matter

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Managing Editor

CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 1916

The Secret Wolf *A Complete Novel* . . . . . S. Carleton 3

Never was there a stranger town than "Skunk's Misery," never more cool, ruthless men than those from that town who set out to drive one man from his own mine, another from the girl he loves. And that master mind directing the attack has even the lean timber-wolves at his command. Sometimes weird as Poe, often charming, always vivid and forceful, we'll wager this mystery tale of Canada will make you "take notice."

Shep of the Wandering Foot . . . . . Paul H. Harris 86

Shake hands with *Shep*. He's worth knowing, this cyclone salesman, who can unload anything on the Chinaman, from herring to phonographs; this having to do with a certain brunette, and the clash of keen Western brains in the Orient.

O Adventurers *Poem* . . . . . A. Judson Hanna 93

The Tide-Mating . . . . . S. B. H. Hurst 94

A quiet, beautiful tale of a maid's love for her sailor sweetheart—a man of the life-boat crew—and of a great tragedy which swept down the coast on the wings of a gale.

A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse . . . . . W. C. Tuttle 101

The biggest, strangest, most contrary animal ever seen west of Denver smashes into Yellow Horse settlement, spurred on by two irrepressible cow-punchers. Even a "44" can't stop him. And what he does is side-splitting. Tuttle spins the yarn—you know him—a headline humorist.

Trailing the Jungle Man . . . . . George Warburton Lewis 112

A man-hunt in the little-known Panama back-country. Told by a member of the secret service, an expert man-hunter himself, who is at home in tropical jungles.

A West Indian Dance *Poem* . . . . . Richard Butler Glaenzer 122

In the Grip of the Minotaur *A Four-Part Story. Part II.* . . . Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur 123

Ragnarr, a stalwart young Norse prince, defies the Master of the Mediterranean—shakes his fist under the nose of *King Minos* of Crete—and things develop with lightning swiftness. It's not too late to begin now this thrilling serial of the Ancient World, and to meet *Ilia*, Princess of Troy, charming, strong-willed, firm in her stand for a woman's rights, even though she faced an age when man alone ruled, at the dawn of civilization.

Snuffy and the Monster . . . . . Gates Glen 148

How the nerve of a motorman was broken by the "monster," a great steel-bodied thing which struck fear into the hearts of street-railway men. Then *Snuffy*, the motorman, and the Monster clinch.

(Continued on next page)

Digitized by Google

(*Continued from preceding page*)

The Unmudding of the Empire . . . . . **Douglas S. Watson** 155

Here's a man who knows the oil country as only one can who has sunk and drawn fortunes from the derrick-fields. He tells you of those strapping drillers, men of brawn and bone, who fight to blast wealth from the earth's heart.

Guiding Clementine . . . . . **Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton** 168

Clementine needs guiding. She is a goat which tenderfoot tourists take into the Northland that baby may have fresh milk. And *Clementine* proceeds to make history—and trouble—that you may have a half-hour packed with chuckles.

Fifty-Fifty . . . . . **Leland Ward Peck** 180

Railroad-builders. The eternal feud between the "hard-rock men" and the "skinners," those who drill and blast, and those who scrape and dig and fill, brings two strong men face to face in a test of bravery which will take your breath.

The Man Who Built Up from the Ace . . . . . **Henry Martel Gwynn** 186

When the turning-point came in the life of a lonely schoolmaster who must still stifle through long Philippine months ere he can return to "God's country"—and her.

The Man-Breaker . . . . . **Hapsburg Liebé** 188

A determined man sets out to break the power that rules the Tennessee lumber country. Sweet as mountain laurel is the love of a hill-maid for this man. With a delicate "lift" all his own, Mr. Liebe transports you up among his own quaint wholesome people.

Heroes All . . . . . **Arthur D. Howden Smith** 198

Old *Captain McConaughy* leads his psalm-singing crew of tramp-steamer sailors straight at the strong Turkish defenses at Gallipoli. There's the taste of salt and the whip of ocean spray through every page, for the writer loves the sea.

The Camp-Fire **A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers** 215

Headings . . . . . **Edward Hopper**

COMING

in the next ADVENTURE, October, out September 3d.

A complete book-length detective novel with a puzzling plot and a double-barreled climax.

"THE MILLIONTH CHANCE"

By **Arthur Somers Roche**

A novelette of action—of quick, flashing, continuous action—with a situation that grows tense almost to the limit of nerve endurance.

"THE BOSS OF POWDERVILLE"

By **Thomas Addison**

To find out about the serial and the ten other stories scheduled for the October *Adventure*, turn to "The Trail Ahead" on the last page of this issue.

Issued Monthly. **Yearly Subscription, $1.50 in advance.** **Single copy, fifteen cents.**

Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1916, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Digitized by Google

Adventure September 1916
Registered in the U. S. Patent Office
Vol. 12
No. 5

THE SECRET WOLF

A COMPLETE NOVEL by S. CARLETON

I

I COME HOME; AND THE WOLVES HOWL

I am sick of the bitter wood-smoke,
And sick of the wind and rain.
I will leave the bush behind me,
And look for my love again.

LITTLE as I guessed it, this story really began at Skunk's Misery. But Skunk's Misery was the last thing in my head, though I had just come from the place.

Hungry, dog-tired, cross with the crossness of a man in authority whose orders have been forgotten or disregarded, I drove Billy Jones's old canoe across Lac Tremblant, on my way home to Dudley Wilbraham's gold-mine at La Chance after an absence of months. It was half-way to dark, and the bitter November wind blew dead in my teeth. Slaps of spray from flying wave-crests blinded me with gouts of lake water that was oddly warm till the cutting wind froze it to a coating of solid ice on my bare hands and stinging face, that I had to keep dabbing on my paddling shoulder to get my eyes clear to stare in front of my leaky, borrowed canoe.

To a stranger there might have seemed to be nothing particular to stare at, out on a lake where the world was all wind and lumpy seas and growing November twilight; but any one who'd lived at the La Chance mine knew better.

By the map Lac Tremblant should have been our nearest gold route to civilization, but it was a lake that was no lake, as far as transport was concerned, and we never used it. The five-mile crossing I was making was just a fair sample of the forty miles of length Lac Tremblant stretched mockingly past the La Chance mine toward the main road from Caraquet—our nearest settlement—to railhead; and that was forty miles of queer water, sown with rocks that were sometimes visible as the tombstones in a cemetery and sometimes hidden like rattlesnakes in a blanket.

For the depth of Lac Tremblant, or its fairway, were two things no man might ever count on. It would fall in a night to

Copyright, 1916, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. All rights reserved.

Digitized by Google

shallows a child could wade through, among bristling needles of rocks no one had ever guessed at; and rise in a morning to the tops of the spruce scrub on its banks—a sweet spread of water with not a rock to be seen.

What hidden spring fed it was a mystery. But in the bitterest Winter it was never cold enough to freeze, further than to surging masses of frail ice that would not let a canoe push through them, nor yet support the weight of a man. Winter or Summer it was no thoroughfare, and neither was the ungodly jumble of swamp and mountains that stopped me from tapping the lower end of it, or I would not have spent the last three months making fifty miles of road through untrodden bush to Caraquet, to transport the La Chance gold over the first stage to a post-road and a railway. And it was no chosen return route of mine to La Chance now, either.

If I could draw a decent map I should not have to explain it. But the line of Lac Tremblant and that of the road I had just made from Caraquet ran away from each other in two sides of a triangle, except that the La Chance mine was five miles down the far side of the lake from Caraquet, and my road had to half-moon round the head of Lac Tremblant to get home; lavishly too, by reason of swamps.

But it was on that half-moon road that I should have been now, if my order to have a horse meet me at the Halfway stables I had built at the beginning of it had not been forgotten or disregarded by some one at La Chance. Getting drenched to the skin with lake water was no rattling good exchange of riding home on a fresh horse that felt warm as a stove under me, but a five-mile short cut across the apex of the road and lake triangle was better than doing twenty-two miles along the side of it on my own legs, which was the only choice I had in the matter.

I had to get home, for reasons of my own, and when I walked in on Billy Jones at the Halfway that afternoon, after months of absence and road-making, there was not even a team horse in his stable, let alone my saddle mare. There was not a soul round the place, either, but Billy himself, sprawling over a grubby old newspaper by his shack stove.

No one had told him a word about me or my horse, he informed me. And there were no work-horses at the Halfway, because he had doubled up the teams for some heavy hauling from Caraquet the week before, according to my orders, and no horses had been sent back from La Chance since. He guessed affably that some one might be over from the mine in the morning, and that after tramping from Caraquet I had better stay where I was for the night.

I hesitated. I had not tramped from Caraquet that day, though I was dog-tired for once in my life. But I had no wish to explain to Billy Jones that I had been making a fool of myself elsewhere, doing a solid week of hospital nursing over a filthy boy I found on my road the morning I really left Caraquet. From the look of him I guessed he had got hurt cutting down a tree and not getting out of the way in time, for he was past telling me that or anything else. But I also guessed where he lived, by the dirt on him, and was ass enough to carry him home to the squalid half French, half Indian village the Caraquet people called "Skunk's Misery."

It lay in the bush, in a slanting line between Caraquet and Lac Tremblant: a nest of thriftless evil stuck in a hollow you might pass within twenty yards of and never guess held a house. Once there I had no choice but to stay and nurse the boy's sickening pain, till his mother came home from somewhere she was fishing eels for the Winter, for none of the rest of the population of fat-faced, indifferent women—I never saw a man, whether they were away in the lumber-woods or not—would lay a hand to him.

I will say right here I was more than thankful to hand him over to his mother. I had spilt a bottle of some nameless and abominable brew over myself, that I'd taken for liniment, and my clothes smelled like carrion; also the lean-to I lived in was so dirty that I scratched from suspicion all day long, except when I was yawning from a week of never closing my eyes.

Altogether, as I said, I was dog-tired, though it was not from walking, and I might have stayed at Billy Jones's if I had not been crazy to get rid of my dirt-infected clothes. The worst reek had gone off them, but even out in the open air they smelled. I saw Billy Jones wrinkle up his nose to sniff innocently while he spoke to me, and that settled me.

"I have to get home," I observed hastily. "Wilbraham expected me a week ago. But I don't walk any twenty-two miles. I'll

Digitized by Google

take your old canoe, and a short cut across the lake."

I was the only man who ever used Lac Tremblant, and the foreman of the Halfway stables cast a glance on me.

"If it was me, I'd walk," he remarked dryly. "But take your choice. The lake's a short cut, right enough, only I wouldn't say where to—in my crazy old birchbark this kind of a blowing-up evening!"

That, and a few more things he said as he squinted a weather-wise eye on the lake, came back to me as I fought his old canoe through the water. And fighting it was, mind you, for the spray hid the rocks I knew, and the wind shoved me back on the ones I didn't know. Also, the canoe was leaking till she was dead logy, and the gusts were so heavy I could not stop paddling to bail her. The short, vicious seas that snapped at me five ways at once were the color of lead, and felt as thick as cold molasses.

But, for all that, crossing Lac Tremblant was saving me twenty-two miles on my feet, and I was not wasting any dissatisfaction on the traverse. Only, as I shoved the canoe forward, I was nearer to being played out, from one thing and another, than ever I was in my life.

I sort of pretended the paddle that began to hang in spite of me was only heavy with freezing spray, and that the dead ache in my back was a kink. But I had to put every ounce there was in my six feet of weary bones into lightning-change wrenches to hold the old canoe head on to the splattering seas and keep her from swamping. I was pretty near to thinking I had been a fool not to have stayed with Billy Jones, when I was suddenly aware of absolute, utter calm in the air that felt as warm on my face as if I'd gone into a house; of tranquil water under the forefoot of the canoe that jumped forward under me as the resistance of the wind ceased; and of the lake shore, dark, featureless, silent, within twenty feet of me. I was across Lac Tremblant and in the shelter of the La Chance shore.

There is no good in denying that for five minutes all I did was to sit back and breathe. Then I lit my pipe that was dry because it was inside my shirt, bailed the unnecessary water out of the canoe and the immediate neighborhood of my legs and, without meaning to, turned a casual eye on the shore at my right hand.

It might have been because I was tired, but that shore struck me as if I had never seen it before; and on a November evening it was not an inviting prospect. Bush and bush, and more bush, grew down to the very verge of the water, in a mass that spoke of heavy swamp and no landing. Behind that I knew was rising land, country rock, and again swamp and more swamp; and all of it harsh, ugly, and inhospitable. And the queer thought came over me that it was more than inhospitable: it was forbidding.

High over my head the bitter wind poured in a river of sound through the bare treetops; close at hand it rustled with a flurry of dead leaves that was uncannily like the bustle of inimical businesses pursued insolently in the dark, at my very elbow; and suddenly, through and over all other sounds, there rose in the harsh gloom the long, ravening cry of a wolf.

Heaven knows I was used to the place, and no howling was much to me; but you know how things come over you sometimes. It came over me that I was sick of my life at La Chance; sick of working with Wilbraham; and sicker still of washing myself in brooks and sleeping on the ground, for I had not been in a house since August.

Before I knew it I was speaking out loud like men do in books, only it was something I had thought of before, which in books it generally isn't:

"Scott, I'm a fool to stay here. I'd sooner go and work on day's wages somewhere, and have a place to go home to!"

And then I felt my face get red in the dark, for I knew what I meant, if you do not.

There was nothing to go home to at Wilbraham's, except a roof over my head, till circumstances sent me out into the bush again. In the daytime there was the mine and the mill. At night there was the bare living-room of Wilbraham's shack, without a book or a paper or a decent chair; Wilbraham himself, fat, pig-headed, truculent, stumping the devil's sentry-go up and down the bare floor, talking eternally about himself and the mine, till a saint must have loathed the two of them; Thompson, the mine superintendent, silent, slow and stupid, playing ghastly solitaire games in a corner with a pack of dirty cards; and me, Nick Stretton, hunching myself irritably on a hard chair till I could decently go to bed.

Even the bush alone was better than

Digitized by Google

night after night of that. And suddenly I felt my thoughts bursting out, if I had sense enough to keep my mouth shut.

I was as sick of the bush as I was of the shack. I wanted a place of my own and a life of my own; and I was going to have it. There was nothing but old friendship to tie me to Wilbraham's. I could do as well anywhere else, and I was going there—tomorrow—going somewhere, anyhow, where when my day's work was over I could go home to a blazing log fire on a wide hearth, instead of Wilbraham's smelly stove where no one ever cleaned the creosote out of the pipe, and where the girl I had had in my head for ten years would be sitting waiting for me.

Don't imagine it was any girl I knew I was thinking of; it was just a dream girl I meant to marry when I found her. I'd never met such a girl anywhere, and it sounds like a fool to say I knew I was going to meet her, that she was waiting somewhere in the world for me, just as I was looking for her.

I knew exactly what she must be like. She would have that waving bronze-gold hair that stands out in little separate, shining tendrils; eyes that startled you with their clear blue under dark level eyebrows—I never look twice at a girl with arched brows—the rose-white, satin-smooth skin that goes with all of them. And she would move like—well, you've seen Pavlowa move! Her voice—somehow one of the most important things I knew about her seemed to be her voice—would be the clear, carrying kind that always sounds gay.

I was certain I should know my dream-girl, first, by that. And that was the girl—I forgot it was all made-up child's play—who somewhere in the world was looking for me, Nick Stretton; a fool with nothing on earth but six feet of a passably good body, and a dark, high-nosed face like an Indian's, who was working in the bush for Wilbraham instead of sieving creation for her. Well, I would start tomorrow; and, where the clean heavens meant me to, I would find her.

WITH the words I came alive to the dark lake, and the leaky canoe I sat in, and the knowledge that all I had been thinking about a bronze-haired girl was just the cracked dream of a lonely man. Even if it had not been, and I could have started to look for a real girl tomorrow, I had to get back to Wilbraham's tonight.

My drenched clothes were freezing on me, and I was hungrier than the wolf who had just howled again as I picked up my slippery paddle and started for the La Chance landing. There was no light there, naturally, since no one ever used the lake except me, and I had been away for months; but as I rounded the point between me and it, and slipped into the dark of the landing, the lamplight from Wilbraham's living-room shone out on me in a narrow beam like a moon-path on the water. As I crossed it and beached the canoe I must have been in plain sight to any one on the shore, though all I saw was the dark shingle I got out on.

I stooped to lift the canoe out of water, and I did what people mean when they say you nearly jump out of your skin.

Touching my shoulder, her hand fiercely imperative in the dark, was a girl—at La Chance, where no girl had ever set foot!—and she was speaking to me with just that golden, carrying voice I knew would belong to my own dream-girl, if she was keeping it down to a whisper.

"So you're here," was what she said; and it would have fitted in with the fool's thoughts I had just come out of, if it had not been for her tone.

That startled me till all I could do was to nod in the dark I could just see her in. I could not see what she looked like, for her head was muffled in a shawl; and I never realized that all she could see of me was my height and make, since where I stood in the shadow my face must have been invisible. But if I had been collected enough to remember that, she would have knocked it out of me.

"You!" her golden voice stabbed like a dagger. "I won't have you staying here—where I am! I told you I'd speak to you when I could, and I'm speaking. You kept your word and disgraced me once, if I don't know how you did it, but I won't run the chance of *that* again! I'm safe here, except for you; and you've got to let me alone! If you don't, I—I——"

She stammered till I knew she was shaking, but she got hold of herself in the second.

"You won't find it safe to play any tricks with the gold here—nor me—if that's what

Digitized by Google

you came for," she said superbly, "and you've given me a way to stop it. That's why I've sneaked out to meet you—not because I care for you. You must go away, or I'll tell that you're here! Do you hear? I don't care what promises you make—they always came easily to you. If you want me to hold my tongue about you, you've got to go. Go and betray me, if you like, but go!"

There was dead cold hatred in it, the sort a woman has for a man she once cared for, and it staggered what wits I had left. I nodded like a fool, just as if I had known what she was talking about, and went on lifting the canoe ashore.

Whether I really heard her give a terrified gasp I don't know; perhaps I only thought so. But as I put the canoe on the bank I heard a rustle, and when I looked up she was gone. There was nothing to tell me she had really ever been there. It was just as probable that I was crazy, or walking in my sleep, as that a girl who talked like that—or even any kind of girl—should be at La Chance.

The cold, collected hatred in her voice still jarred me, since it was no way for even a dream-girl to speak. But what jarred me worse was that the whole thing had been so quick I could not have sworn she had been there at all.

I was honestly dazed as I walked up the rough path to Wilbraham's and my shack. I must have stood in front of it a good five minutes, with my wet clothes freezing as hard as a board, and the noise of the men in the bunk-house down by the mine coming up to me on the night wind.

"'If I be I, as I should be, I've a little dog at home and he'll know me,'" I said to myself at last like the old woman in the story-book, only with a grin. For when I went into the house there would be the neglected living-room with the smelly stove, and Wilbraham walking up and down there as usual; and Dudley Wilbraham's conversation would bring any man back to his senses, even if he needed it worse than I did. I opened the shack door and went in; and in the bare passage I jerked up taut.

The living-room faced me—and there was no stove in it, and no Wilbraham walking up and down and talking to himself. There was a glowing, blazing log fire in a stone fireplace that must have been built while I was away, and sitting alone before it, exactly as I had always thought of her, was my dream-girl that I had meant to hunt the world for to welcome me home!

II

MY DREAM—AND DUDLEY'S GIRL!

ALL I could do was to stand in the living-room doorway and stare at her.

There she sat by the fire, in a short blue skirt that showed her little feet in blue stockings and buckled shoes, and a blue sweater whose rolling collar fell away from the column of her soft throat. And she was just exactly what I had known she would be.

There was a gold crest to every exquisite, warm wave of her bronze hair; her level eyebrows were about five shades darker, and her curled-up eyelashes darker still, where she sat with her head bent over some sort of sewing. And even before she looked up, and I saw her eyes, the beauty of her caught me at my heart. I had never thought even my dream-girl could be as lovely as she was.

But there was more to her face than beauty. It was so young, and sweet, and gay, and yet, if you looked hard at her, so sad, that I forgot I ought either to speak up or go away. Of who she was or how she came to be at La Chance, I had no earthly clue. I knew, of course, it was she who had met me at the landing, and common sense told me she had taken me for some one else; but I had no desire to say so, or to go away either. And suddenly she looked up and saw me.

Whoever she was she had good nerves, for she never even stared as women do at a strange man. I could have been no reassuring vision either, standing there with moccasined feet that had come in on her as silently as a wolf or an Indian; dirty, frozen clothes; and a face that the Lord knows is dark and hard at its best, and must have been forbidding enough that night between dirt and fatigue. But that girl only glanced at me as quietly as if she had known I was there.

"Did you — were you looking for any one?" she said.

And the second I heard her voice I knew she guessed she had spoken to me a quarter of an hour ago in words she would probably have given all she possessed to prevent a stranger from knowing she had need to speak to any one.

Digitized by Google

Only that was not the reason I half stammered, "Not exactly." It was just because I could see her eyes, and they were like sapphires, and the sea, and the night sky with the first stars in it. I snatched off my cap that I had forgotten, and bits of melting ice fell off it and tinkled on the floor.

The sharp little sound brought my wits back to me. Perhaps I had never really thought my dream-girl would come true, but once I had really found her I never meant to lose her. And I knew, if I cared a straw for my life and the love that was to be in it, I must meet her now, for the first time; that nothing, not even if she said so herself, must make me admit she had come to me at the lake by mistake, or that I had ever heard her voice before. I said, easily enough:

"I'm afraid I startled you. I'm Stretton, Wilbraham's partner—" which I was, to the extent of a thousand dollars—"I've just come home."

And crazy as it sounds, I felt as if I had come home, for the first time in my life. For the girl of my dreams came to her feet with just that lovely, controlled ease you see in Pavlowa, and the prettiest little gesture of welcome.

"Oh, you're frozen stiff," she said with a kind of dismayed sympathy. "And—why, I heard Mr. Wilbraham say some one had forgotten to send out a horse for you, and that you'd probably walk the whole way from Caraquet! You must be tired to death. Please come to the fire and get warm—now you've come home!"

I thought of the queer smell that clung to my stained old coat, and the company I had kept at Skunk's Misery, though if I had guessed what that wretched boy was going to mean to me I might have grudged my contact with him less, and I would not have gone near my dream-girl for a fortune.

"I think I'll get clean first," I began, and found myself laughing for the first time in a week.

But as I turned away I glanced back from the dark passage where Charliet, the French-Canadian cook, was supposed to keep a lamp and never did, and saw the girl in the living-room look after me, with a look I had never seen in any girl's eyes, if I'd seen a hunted man have it.

"Gad, she knows I know she met me, and she doesn't mean to say so," I thought vividly.

What the reason was I couldn't see, nor who there could be at La Chance a girl like that should find it necessary to tell that she would not have him disgrace her, and he must go away. It made me angry to think there could be any one she needed to hit out at like that. But we had a queer lot at the mine, including Dunn and Collins, a couple of educated boys who had not been educated enough to pass as mining engineers, and had been kicked out into the world by their families. It might have been either of those two star failures in the bunk-house.

The only person it could not have been was Dudley Wilbraham; since, let alone she could speak to him in the shack, she could not have told him he must go away from his own mine. Which reminded me I'd never even asked where Dudley was, nor one thing about the mine I'd been mostly away from since June. But my dream-girl, where no girl had ever been, was the only thing I could think of. I had meant to get some grub and go to bed, but instead I threw my Skunk's Misery clothes out of the window and got ready to go down to supper and see that girl again.

Who on earth she could be, beat me, as well as how she came to be at La Chance. I would have been scared green that she was married to some one at the mine, only she had no wedding-ring on the slim left hand that had beckoned me to the fire. Yet, "She can't be here alone, either, and I'm blessed if I see who she can have come with," I thought blankly. And I opened my room door, straight on Wilbraham's sister, Marcia.

"Well!" I said.

It was the only thing that came to me. I knew, of course, that the girl in the living-room must have come out with Marcia, but it knocked me silly to see Marcia at La Chance herself. I had known Marcia Wilbraham, as I had known Dudley, ever since I wore blue knickerbockers trimmed with white braid.

She never went anywhere with Dudley. She had money of her own, and she spent it on Horse Show horses, and traveling round to show them. But here she stood in front of me in a forsaken, backwoods mine that I would not have expected even Dudley himself to stay at if I had not known his reasons.

"I don't wonder you say 'well!'" Marcia returned crisply.

Digitized by Google

She was good looking in a big way, if you did not mind brown eyes that were too small for her face, and a smile that showed her gums. I had never liked her nor disliked her particularly, any more than you do a girl about your own age that you've always known.

"I've been here for three months! I was very nearly going home last week—but I don't believe I will now. I think I'll try a Winter here."

"A Winter!" I thought of Marcia trying a Winter; and I laughed.

"Oh, you needn't throw back your handsome Indian head to grin at me, Nicky Stretton," said she crossly. "I'm tired of always doing the same thing. And anyhow, the stable lost money, and I had to sell out!"

"But why stay out here—with Dudley?" I let out; the two of them had always fought like cats.

"I'm going to do some shooting, and—wolf-hunting." Marcia smiled the ugly smile I never could stand. "I'm going to stay, anyhow. So you'll have to bear it, Nicky."

"I'm charmed!"

I thought like lightning that my dream-girl would do whatever Marcia did, and I blessed my stars she was staying; though I knew she would be all kinds of a nuisance if she insisted on turning out to hunt wolves. She was all but dressed for it even then, in a horrid green divided skirt that made her look like a fat old man. But it was not Marcia I meant to talk about.

"Have you brought the other girl—to hunt wolves, too?" I inquired, as we moved on down the passage; there was no upstairs to the shack.

"No," said Marcia quite carelessly if I had not caught the snap in her eyes; "no! She's come to hunt Dudley! She's going to marry him."

"She's what?"

I was suddenly thankful we had left the light from my open door, and that Charliet despised keeping a lamp in the passage. The bland idea that I had found my dream-girl split to bits as if a half-ton rock had landed on it. For her to be going to marry any one was bad enough; but Dudley, with his temper and his drink, and the drugs I was pretty sure he took—the thing was so unspeakable that I stopped short in the passage.

Marcia Wilbraham stopped short too.

"I don't wonder you're knocked silly," she said. "Here, come out of this; I want to speak to you, and I may as well do it now."

She pushed me into the office where Dudley did his accounts, which was his name for sitting drinking all day and never speaking to any one. She shut the door.

"Look here, Nicky, if you're thinking that girl is a friend of mine, she isn't! I don't know one thing about her, except that this Summer I had reason to oblige Dudley, and one day he came to me—you know he was in New York for nearly two months."

I nodded. I had not cared where he was, so that he was away from La Chance, where he and old Thompson would drive a tunnel just where I knew it was useless.

"Well, he came to me in the first of August, and said he was going to marry a girl called Paulette Brown, and he wanted me to bring her out here. Why he didn't marry her straight off, and bring her here himself, I don't know. He only hummed and hawed when I asked him. But anyhow, I met Paulette Brown, for the first time, at the station, when we started up here—she and I and Dudley. And she puzzled me from the second we got into the car drawing-room and I saw her pull off the two veils she'd worn round her head in the station. And she puzzles me worse now."

"Why?" I might have been puzzled myself, remembering Paulette Brown's speech to me in the dark, but it was none of Marcia's business.

"Because I know I've seen her before," Marcia returned calmly, "only with no 'Paulette Brown' tacked on to her; I've seen her dance somewhere, only I can't think where—and that's the first thing that puzzles me."

"I don't see why," I said disagreeably, "considering every one dances somewhere all day long just now."

"It wasn't that kind of dancing. It was rather—wonderful! And there was some story tacked on to it," Marcia frowned, "only I can't think what. And the second thing that puzzles me about her—I tell you Nicky, I believe she can't bear Dudley and that she doesn't want to marry him!"

It was the first decent thing I had heard from her, and I could have opened my mouth and cheered. But I said:

"Then why's she here?"

Digitized by Google

"Just because it suits her for some reason of her own." Marcia was earnest as I had never seen her. "Nicky, I don't think she's anything in the world but some kind of an adventuress; only what I can't understand about her is what she wants of Dudley! It isn't money, for I know he's tried to make her take it and she wouldn't. Yet I know, too, that she hadn't a cent coming up here, and she hasn't now, nor even any clothes but Summer things, and a blue sweater she wears all the time. She never speaks about herself, nor where she came from——"

"I don't see why there should be any mystery about that!" It was a lie; but I might not have seen, if she had not spoken incomprehensibly to me in the dark. "Dudley probably knows all about her people."

"A girl called Paulette Brown doesn't have any people," scornfully. "Besides, her name isn't Brown, nor Paulette. She used to forget to answer to either of them at first; and if Dudley knows what it really is, I'm going to know too—before I'm a month older. I tell you I've seen her before, and I know there was some kind of an ugly story tacked on to her and her dancing. That, and her real name, are up in the attic of my brain somewhere, and some day they'll come down!"

"Well, they won't concern me," I cut in stolidly.

Whoever Paulette Brown was, if she were going to marry Dudley Wilbraham ten times over, she was the one girl in the world who belonged to me, and I was not going to have her discussed by Marcia behind a shut door.

But Marcia's retort was too quick for me.

"They may interest you, all the same—if that girl's what I think she is! Don't make any mistake, Nicky; she's no chorus girl out of work. She's a lady; only, she's been —something else, too. You watch how she uses a perfectly trained, educated body——"

I all but started. I had seen it already, when I thought she moved like Pavlowa.

"Anything else?" I inquired disagreeably.

"Yes," said Marcia quietly, "she's afraid for her life, or Dudley's; I can't make out which. Wait and you'll see. Come on. We'll be late for supper. It would have been over hours ago if Dudley and I hadn't been out shooting this afternoon. We've only just come in."

But I was not thinking about supper. The Wilbrahams had been out; and Paulette Brown, left alone, had taken her chance to speak to some one. That she had happened to mistake her man, and spoken to me, made no difference in the fact, and it came too aptly on Marcia's suspicions about her. But, "My good Heavens! I won't care what she did," I thought fiercely.

My dream-girl's eyes were honest, if they were deep-blue lakes a man might drown his soul in, too. If she were Dudley's twice over I was going to stand by her, because by all my dreams of her she was more mine.

"I haven't got time, nor chances, to be watching pretty ladies," said I dryly, "and I wouldn't bother over it myself if I were you. I'd let it go at plain Paulette Brown!"

"If you could!" said Marcia just as dryly; and over her words, close outside the window, a wolf howled.

It startled me, as it had startled me once before that evening, only this time I knew the reason.

"Scott! I never knew the wolves to be coming out so early in the season!" I was thankful to be back to things I could exclaim about. "And down here, beside the house, I never saw any!"

"No; so Dudley said," said Marcia almost absently.

She opened the door for herself, because I had forgotten to, and stood looking at the lighted living-room down at the end of the passage by the front door.

"But the wolves have been round for a week—that was what I meant when I said I was going to have some wolf-hunts. The mine superintendent's going to take me."

"Thompson!" I let out; then I chuckled.

Marcia was likely to have a great wolf-hunt with Thompson, who knew no difference between a shotgun and a rifle, and would have legged it from a fox if he met it alone.

"Marcia Wilbraham, I'll pay you five dollars if you ever get out wolf-hunting with Thompson. Why, the only thing he can do for diversion is to play solitaire!"

"Oh, him—yes," said Marcia carelessly, and without grammar. "But I didn't mean old Thompson. He's been gone for a month, and we've got a new man. His name's Macartney, and he's been here two weeks."

It was news to me, if it was also an example of the way Dudley Wilbraham ran

Digitized by Google

his mine. But before I could speak Marcia nodded significantly down the passage to the living-room door. I had been looking into the room myself, like you do at the lighted stage of a theater, and I had seen only one thing in it—my dream-girl, whose name might or might not be Paulette Brown, whom Dudley Wilbraham had more right to than I had. She was sitting by the fire as when I had left her—that fire I had dreamed I would come home to, just myself alone—and talking to Dudley. But Marcia had been looking at something else, and now my gaze followed hers.

A tall, lean, hard, capable-looking man stood on the other side of the fire. He was taking no share in the conversation between Dudley and the girl who had only lived in my dreams, till tonight. He was watching the living-room door, quite palpably, and it struck me abruptly that I had not far to seek for Marcia's Wilbraham's reason for staying the Winter at La Chance. But I might have taken more interest in that, and in Macartney, the new mine superintendent, too, if the girl sitting by the fire had not seen Marcia in the doorway and risen to her feet.

For she floated up, effortlessly, unconsciously, to the very tips of her toes, and stood so, like Pavlowa.

III

DUDLEY'S MINE, AND DUDLEY'S GOLD

> I have stared my eyes blind for her,
> Bridled my body alive for her;
> Starved my soul to the rind for her—
> Shall I lose all?
>
> —*The Lost Lover.*

I COULD feel Marcia's satisfied, significant smile through the back of my neck as I shook hands with Dudley, and was introduced in turn to Miss Brown—the last name for her, even without the affected Paulette, though I might not have thought of it but for Marcia—and to Macartney, the new incumbent of Thompson's shoes.

Dudley, little and fat, sprawling in the dirty boots he had worn all day, and just a little loaded, told me to wait till the morning or go to the devil, when I asked about the mine. Charliet banged the food on the table for supper—Marcia despised housekeeping, and if the living-room fire had been reformed nothing else had—and I sat down in silence and ate. At least, I shoveled food into my famished stomach. My attention was elsewhere.

Paulette Brown sat next to Dudley. She was just twice as pretty as I had realized, even when the first sight of her struck me dumb. Her eyes were dark as indigo in the lamplight, and a marvelous rose color flitted in her cheeks as she spoke or was silent. She had wonderful hands, too, slim and white, without a sign of a bone at the wrists; but I had a curious feeling that they were the very strongest hands I had ever seen on a girl, too.

Remembering Dudley, it hurt me to look at her; and something else suddenly hurt me worse, that I had been a fool not to have thought of before. Macartney, the mine superintendent, was new there; I knew no more of him than I did of Paulette Brown—not so much, perhaps, thanks to Marcia—and it came over me that he might have been the man she had taken me for tonight, and that it was he she had crept out into the dark to speak to in secret. I looked at him over my coffee cup; and there was something about him that I did not like.

He was a tall man, very capable-looking, as I said; extremely fair, and rather handsome, with hard, grayish eyes that looked straight at you when he spoke. He had a charming laugh, yet when he laughed I saw suddenly what it was that I did not like about him; and it was nothing more nor less than a certain set look about his eye muscles. Some gamblers have it, and it did not strike my fancy in the new mine superintendent at La Chance.

But watch as I might, I saw no sign of an understanding between him and my dream-girl. It was impossible to be sure, of course, but I was nearly sure. She spoke to him as she spoke to Marcia and Dudley—she never addressed one word to me—just easily and simply, like people do who live in the same house. Macartney himself talked mostly to Marcia, which was no business of mine. Only I was somehow curiously thankful that it had not been Macartney whom Paulette had meant to speak to in the dark: there was something about his eyes that said he was no safe customer for a girl to speak to with hatred, especially a girl whom another girl was watching, like Marcia was watching Paulette Brown.

I decided it must have been either Dunn

Digitized by Google

or Collins, our two worthless Yale boys in the mine, that she had wanted to get rid of, and I felt better; for it would be easy enough to save her the trouble by doing that myself. They might just have come back to La Chance like me, for all I knew, because Dudley had a trick of sending the men, Heaven knew where, to prospect.

It was rot, anyhow, to be taking a girl's affairs so seriously. I looked at my dream-girl's clear eyes and thought that if she knew what Marcia and I were thinking about her she might have good reason to be pretty angry. Also that Dudley probably knew all about her evening stroll, and what she was doing at La Chance, if Marcia did not. And Dudley's self-important voice cut through my thoughts like a knife.

"Where on earth were you this evening, Paulette?" he was demanding irritably. "I couldn't see a sign of you when Marcia and I went out, and you weren't anywhere when we came in!"

"I don't know," the girl began; and I saw the color go out of her face, and it made me angry.

"I can tell you where Miss Brown was," I said deliberately, "if she's ashamed to own it! She was good and settled by this fire."

Why I lied for her I could not say. But the glance she turned on me gave me a flat sort of feeling, as if Marcia might be right and she was there for reasons of her own that I had all but stumbled on by accident. I was a fool to care; but then I had been a fool all day with my silly thoughts of leaving La Chance to chase the world for an imaginary girl, and more fool still to think I had found her there waiting for me.

I said something about being tired, and went off to bed. I was tired, right enough, but I was something else too. All that business about the girl I meant to find and marry may sound like a child's game to you, but it had been more than a game to me. It had been a solid prop to hold to in ugly places where a man might slip, if he had not clean love and a girl in his head. And now, at seven-and-twenty, I wanted my child's game to come true: just my own fire, and my own girl, and a life that held more than mere slaving for money. And it had come true, as far as the fire and the welcome home—only the girl was another man's!

I knew what I ought to do was to get out of La Chance, but I could not screw myself up to the obvious rider that there were other girls in the world than Paulette Brown. I told myself I was too dead tired to care.

I stumbled to my window to open it—Charliet's lamp had burned out while I was at supper and the room was stifling, let alone that I'd had to undress in the dark—and a queer sense that some one or something was under my window made me stand there without making the noise of raising it. And there was something, anyway.

The windows in the shack were about a yard above the ground. There was a glimpse of the moon through the wind-tortured clouds, now on the rough clearing, now on the thick spruces round the edge of it, for my window looked on the bush, not toward the bunkhouse and the mine. And as the moonlight flickered back on the clearing I saw my clothes I had worn at Skunk's Misery, and tossed out for Charliet to burn because they smelled—and something else that made me stare in pure surprise.

There was a wolf, gaunt, dark, fantastic in the moonlight, rolling on my clothes, regardless of the human eyes on him, and within ten feet of the house. It was so crazy that I almost forgot the girl Marcia had said was only called Paulette Brown.

I jerked up the window and stood waiting for the wolf to run. And it did not take the least notice of me. I could have shot it ten times over, but the thing was so incredible that I only stood staring; and suddenly my chance was gone. The beast picked up my coat, like a dog does a bone, and cleared out with it like a streak into the black bush.

"Scott! I never saw a wolf behave like that!" I muttered.

But one more impossibility in an impossible day did not matter. I left the window up and tumbled into bed.

I WOULD have forgotten the thing in the morning, only that when I got up, all my Skunk's Misery clothes had disappeared; and Charliet had not taken them, because I asked him. I did not mention last night's wolf to him, because I was in a hurry to catch Dudley and tell him I meant to leave La Chance. But I did not tell him; for, when I thought of leaving my dream-girl to him, it would not

Digitized by Google

come to my tongue. An obstinate, matter-of-fact devil got up in my heart instead, and prompted me to stay just where I was.

I looked at Dudley, little, fat, pompous, and so self-opinionated that it fairly stuck out of him, and thought that if I had a fair chance I could take my dream-girl from him. I might be dark as an Indian, and without a cent to my name but the few dollars I had sunk in the mine; but I did not drink, nor eat drugs, and I knew Dudley did one and guessed he did the other.

Interfering with him was out of the question, of course; it was not a thing any man could do to his friend deliberately; I supposed he would be good to the girl, according to his lights. But, all the same, I decided to stay at La Chance.

I saw Dudley was brimming over with something, and I hoped to Heaven it was not his engagement, and that I would not have to stand my own thoughts of a girl translated into Dudley's. But he did not mention her. He hooked his fat wrist into my elbow and trotted me down to the mine.

It was an amateur sort of mine, as you may have gathered; Dudley had no use for expert assistance nor for advice. And it was a simple-looking place. The shore of Lac Tremblant ran back flat there to a hill, a quarter of a mile from the water, with a solid rock face like a cliff.

Along that cliff face were first Dudley's shack, then Thompson's tunnel, then, a good way farther down, the bunkhouse, the mill, and a shanty Dudley called the assay office. But I stared at a new hole in the cliff, farther down even than the assay office.

"Why, you've driven a new tunnel!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, my young son," said Dudley; and then he burst out with things.

Macartney had run that new tunnel the first day he came, and struck quartz that was solid for Heaven knew how far, and carrying thick, free gold that assayed incredibly to the ton. The La Chance mine, whose name had been more truth than poetry—for it had been a gamble when I made fifty miles of road that cost like the devil, to haul in machinery, and a mill, it was pitch and toss if we should ever need—had turned out a certainty while I was away.

I stood silent. It meant plenty to me, who had only a trifle in the thing, but I was the only soul in the world who knew what it meant to Dudley. Stocks, carelessness, but chiefly bull-headed extravagance, had run through every cent he had, and La Chance had saved him from having to live on Marcia's charity, if she had any.

There was no fear of his being interfered with in the bonanza he had struck, either; for, leaving out my infinitesimal share, Dudley was sole owner, and he had bought a thousand acres mining concession from the government for ten dollars an acre, which is the law when a potential mining district in unsurveyed territory is more than twenty miles by wagon-road from a railway.

All he had to do with would-be prospectors was to chuck them out. He had got in ten stamps for his mill over the road I had built from Caraquet, and, since Macartney arrived, was milling five tons of stuff whose net result made me stare, after the miserable, two-dollar ore old Thompson had broken my heart with.

"So you see, we're made," Dudley finished simply. "Macartney struck his vein, first go off, and we'll be able to work it all Winter. You'd better start in today and get some snowsheds built along the face of the workings. They ought to have been started a week ago. Why in the devil—" drink and drugs do not make a man easy to work with, and you never knew when Dudley would turn on you with a face like a fiend—"didn't you get back from Caraquet before? You'd nothing to keep you away from the mine this last week!"

"I'd plenty," I returned dryly. "And I may remind you that I didn't propose to have to walk back."

It was the first time I had mentioned my missing horse. I did not mention my errand to Skunk's Misery; it was a side-show of my own, to my mind, and unconnected with Dudley, though I ought to have known that nothing in life ever is a side-show, even if you can't see the door from the big tent.

"Oh, your horse," said Dudley more civilly. "I didn't think I'd forgotten about it, but I suppose I must have. I was a good deal put out getting Thompson off."

"What happened about him?" I had had no chance to ask before.

"Oh, I never could stand him," and I knew it was true. "Sitting all the evening playing cards like a performing dog, and he wasn't fit for his work, either. I told him

Digitized by Google

so, and he said he'd get. He went out to Caraquet nearly a month ago. I thought you knew. Didn't you see him, going through?"

I shook my head. It was a wonder I had not. I had spent most of last month fussing over some bad places on the road, by the turn where I had found my boy from Skunk's Misery, and I ought to have seen Thompson go by. But the solution was simple. There was one Monday and Tuesday I had my road gang off in the bush, on the opposite side from the Skunk's Misery valley, getting stuff to finish a bit of corduroy. In those two days I could have missed seeing Thompson, and I said so.

"You didn't miss much," Dudley returned carelessly. "This Macartney's a long sight better man."

"Where'd you get him?"

I was pretty sure it was not Macartney for whom my dream-girl had mistaken me in the dark, but there was no harm in knowing all I could about him.

Dudley knocked the wind straight out of my half-suspicion.

"Thompson sent him," he returned with a grin. "I told him to get somebody. Oh, we parted friends all right, old Thompson and I! He saw, just as I did, that he wasn't the man for the place. Macartney struck that vein first go off, and that was recommendation enough for me. But here's Thompson's, if you want to see it!"

He extracted a folded letter from a case. It was written in Thompson's careful, back-number copperplate, perhaps not so careful as usual, but his unmistakably. And once and for all I dismissed all idea that it could have been Macartney who was tangled up with Paulette Brown. Old Thompson's friends were not that sort, and he vouched for knowing Macartney all his life.

He was a well-known man, according to Thompson, with a long string of letters after his name. Thompson had come on him by accident and sent him up at once, before he was snapped up elsewhere.

"Thompson seems to have got a move on in sending up his successor," said I idly. "When did he write this?" For there was no envelope, and only "Montreal," with no date, on the letter.

"Dunno—first day he got to Montreal, it says," Dudley returned vaguely. "Come along and have a look at the workings. I want you to get some log shelters built as quick as you can build them. We don't want to have to dig out the tunnel mouth every time it snows. After that you can go to Caraquet with what gold we've got out, and be gone as long as you please. Now, we may have snow any day."

I nodded. The Winter arrives for good at La Chance in November, and, let alone the tunnel mouth, there was no shelter over the ore platform at the mill. This year the snow was late, but there was no counting on that. And I blinked as I went out of the white November sunshine into Macartney's new tunnel and the candle-light of his humming stope.

One glance 'round told me Dudley was right, and the man knew his business; and it was the same over at the mill. It seemed to me, superintendent was a mild name for Macartney, and general manager would have fitted better. But I said nothing, for Dudley's opinion was that he was general manager himself.

Another thing that pleased me about the new man was that he seemed to be doing nothing till you saw how his men jumped for him, while Thompson had never been able to keep his hands off the men's work. There was none of that in Macartney; and if he had struck me as capable the night before, he looked ten times more so now, as he placidly ran four jobs at once.

He was a good-looking figure of a man, too, in his brown duck working-clothes, and I did not wonder Marcia Wilbraham had taken a fancy to him. Dudley would likely be blazing if he caught her philandering with him, but it was no business of mine. And anyhow, Macartney had my blessing, since it could not be he whom Paulette Brown had meant to speak to the night before.

That ought to have been none of my business, either, and to get it out of my head I turned to Dudley, fussing round and talking about tailings; and one omission in all he and Macartney had shown me hopped up in my head.

"Where's your gold?" I demanded.

"That's one thing we don't keep round on the door-steps," Macartney returned coolly, and I rather liked him for it, since he knew nothing of my share in the mine.

But Dudley snapped at him:

"Why can't you say it's in the house—in my office? Stretton's going to take it in to Caraquet; there's no sense in making a

Digitized by Google

mystery to him! Come on, Stretton, and have a look at it now."

He stuck his fat little arm through mine and we went back to the house, by the back door and Charliet's untidy kitchen. It was the shortest way, and it was not till afterward that I remembered it was not commanded by the window in his office, like the front way. I was not keen on going; I had a sickly feeling afterward that it was because I had a presentiment of meeting something I did not want to see. Then all I thought was that I had a hundred other things to do, and, though I went unwillingly, I went.

"The gold's in my safe, in boxes," Dudley said on the way, "and that I'm not going to undo. But I've a lump or two in my desk I'll show you."

"Lying round loose?" I shrugged my shoulders.

"No, it's locked up. But no one ever comes in here but me, and—" he gave a shove at the office door that seemed to have stuck, and got it open—"and Miss Brown."

But I was speechless where I stood behind him. There was the bare office; Dudley's locked desk; Dudley's safe against the wall. And, turning away from the safe, in her blue sweater and blue skirt and stockings and little buckled shoes, was my dream-girl.

Something in my heart turned over as I looked at her. It was not that she had started, for she had not. She just stood in front of me, poised and serene, and some sort of a letter she had been writing lay half finished on Dudley's desk. But something totally outside me told me she had been writing no letter while we were out; that she knew the combination of the safe; had opened it; had but just shut it; and that she had been doing something to the boxes of gold inside!

There was nothing in her face to say so, though, and my thought never struck Dudley. He gave her a nod, and a patronizing, "Well, nice girl," without the least surprise at seeing her there. But I had seen a pin dot of blue sealing-wax on the glimpse of white blouse that showed through the open front of her sweater, and something else.

I stooped, while Dudley was fussing with the lock of his desk, and picked up a curious little gold seal that lay on the floor by the safe.

Whether I meant to speak of it or not I don't know; for, quick as light, the girl held out her hand for it. I said nothing as I gave it to her. Dudley did not see me do it; and of course, it might have been a seal of his own. But, if it was, why did not Paulette Brown say so, or say something, instead of standing dead-white and silent as I turned away?

I knew—as I said "Oh," over Dudley's gold, and my dream-girl slipped out of the room—that I had helped her keep some kind of a secret for the second time, and that if she had any mysterious business at La Chance it was something fishy about Dudley's gold.

IV

THE MAN IN THE DARK

IT SOUNDED crazy, for what could a girl like that do to get hold of gold that was securely packed? But women had been mixed up in ugly work about gold before, and somehow the memory of my dream-girl standing by the safe stuck by me, all day. If I had helped her to cover up a theft from Dudley, it was funny; but the ludicrous side of it did not strike me. What did, was that I must see her alone and get rid of the poisonous distrust of her that she, or Marcia, had put into my head. But that day went by, and two more on top of it, and I had no chance to speak to Paulette Brown.

Part of the reason was, I had not a second to call my own. La Chance had been an amateur mine when we began it, and it was one still. There was only Dudley—who did nothing, and was celebrating himself stupid with drugs, or I was much mistaken—Macartney and myself to run it; with not enough men even to get out the ore, without working the mill and the amalgam plates.

It had been no particular matter while the whole mine was only a tentative business, and I was having half a fit at Dudley's mad extravagance in putting up a ten-stamp mill when we had nothing particular to crush in it. But now, with ore that ran over a hundred to the ton being fed into the mill, and Macartney and I doing the work of six men instead of two, I agreed with Dudley when he announced, in a sober interval, that we required a double shift of men and the mill to crush day and night,

Digitized by Google

instead of stopping at dark; besides a cyanid plant and a man to run it.

But Macartney unexpectedly jibbed at the idea. He returned bluntly that he could attend to the cyanid business himself, when it was really needed; while as to extra men he could not watch a night shift at the plates as well as a day one, and he would have to be pretty sure of the honesty of his new amalgam man before he started in to get one.

Also—and it struck me as a sentiment I had never heard from a mine superintendent before—if we sent out for men, half of those we got might be riff-raff and make trouble for us, without so much as a jail within a hundred miles.

"I'd sooner pick up new men one at a time," he concluded, "even if it takes a month to do. We've got ladies here, and if we got in a gang of tramps——"

He gave a shrug and a significant glance at Dudley.

"Why, we've got some devils out of purgatory now," I began scornfully, then stopped because Dudley suddenly agreed with Macartney.

But the waste of time in making the mine pay for itself, and the stopping of the mill at night galled me; and so did the work I had to do from dawn to dark, because any two-dollar-a-day man could have done it instead.

Macartney seemed to be made of iron, for he took longer hours than I did. But he could talk to Marcia Wilbraham in the evenings, while Dudley stood between me and the dream-girl I thought had come true for me when first I came back to La Chance.

I watched her, though; I couldn't help it. There were times when I could have sworn her soul matched her body and she was honest all through; and times when a devil rose up in me and bade me doubt her: till between work and worry I was no nearer finding out the kind she really was than to discovering the man she had meant to speak to in the dark the night she blundered on me. Yet I had a sort of a clue there, if it was not much of a one. Dunn and Collins, our two slackers who had been kicked out of Yale to land in our bunkhouse, evidently had some game on.

Dunn I was not much bothered about; he was just a plain good-for-nothing, with a perennial chuckle. But Collins was a different story. Tall, pale, good-looking, his blasé young face barely veiled a mind that was an encyclopedia of sin, or I was much mistaken. And he and Dunn had suddenly ceased to raise hades in the bunkhouse every night, and developed a taste for going to bed with the hens. At least, the snoring bunkhouse thought so. If they went abroad instead on whatever they were up to I never caught them at it; but I did catch them watching *me*, like lynxes, whenever they were off shift.

I never saw either of them speak to Miss Brown, but I had a good growing idea that it was just Collins she had meant to speak to the night she spoke to me; and it fitted in well enough with my doubts about her and Dudley's gold, for I would have put no gold-stealing past Collins.

As for Paulette Brown herself, I could see no earthly sense in Marcia's silly statement that "she was afraid for her life, or Dudley's." She was afraid *of* Dudley, I could see that; for she shrank from him quite often. But, on the other hand, I saw her follow him into his office one night when he was fit for no girl to tackle, and try to get him to listen to something. From outside I heard her beg him to "please listen and try to understand," and I made her a sign from the doorway to come away before he flew at her.

I asked her if there was anything I could do, and she said no; it was only something she wanted to tell Dudley. But suddenly she looked at me with those clear eyes of hers.

"You're very—good to me," she said rather piteously.

I shook my head, and that minute I believed in her utterly. But the next night I got a jar. I was starting for Caraquet the morning after, with the gold Dudley had in his office, so I was late in the stable putting washers on my light wagon, and came home by a short cut through the bush, long after dark.

If I moved Indian-silent in my moccasins it was because I always did. But, half-way to the shack clearing, I checked up wolf-silent, which is different. Close by, invisible in the dark spruces, I heard Paulette Brown speaking, and knew that once more she was meeting a man in the dark and, this time, the right one.

I could not see him any more than I could hear him, for he did not speak; but I knew he was there. I crouched to make a

Digitized by Google

blind jump for him, and my dream-girl's voice held me still.

"I don't care how you threaten me—you've got to go," she said doggedly. "I know I've my own safety to look after, but I'll chance that. I'll give you one week more. Then, if you dare to stay on here and interfere with me or the gold or anything else, I'll confess everything to Dudley Wilbraham! I nearly did it last night. I won't trust you—even if it means your giving away my hiding-place to the police!"

Whoever she spoke to moved a little in the dark. He must have muttered something I couldn't hear, for the girl answered sharply:

"As for that, I'm done with you! Whether you go or don't go, this is the last time I'll ever sneak out to meet you. When you dare to say you love me—" and once more the collected hatred in her voice staggered me, only this time I was thankful for it—"I could die! I won't hear of what you say, remember, but I'll give you one week's chance. Then—or if you try anything with me and the gold—I'll tell!"

There was no answer. But my blood jumped in me with sheer fury, for, answer or no answer, I knew who the man beside her was. Close by me, choked but unmistakable, I heard Dunn's chuckle; and where Dunn was it meant Collins was too.

I behaved like a fool. I ought to have bounced through the bush and grabbed Dunn anyway, which might have stopped some of the awful work that was to come. But I stood still, till a sixth sense told me Collins was gone, just as I could have gone myself, without sound or warning.

Even then I paused instead of putting after him. First, because I had no desire to give my reason for firing him next morning; second, because I had a startling, ghastly thought that I'd also heard Macartney's quiet, characteristic footstep moving away; and if a hard, set-eyed man like our capable superintendent had been out listening to what a girl said, as I had, I didn't know how in the devil I was to make him hold his tongue about it. And in the middle of that pleasant thought my dream-girl spoke again, to herself this time:

"Oh I don't trust him! I'll have to get hold of the gold myself, even what I've marked."

On the top of her words a wolf howled startlingly, close by. It was evidently the last touch on what must have been a cheerful evening, for Paulette Brown gave one wild spring and was gone, flying for the kitchen door.

I am not slow on my feet. I was in the front way before she struck the back one, considering the living-room from the door; and what I saw inside of it made me catch my breath with relief and a shock of comforting emotion for the first time that night. Macartney had not been out listening in the dark, if I had. He sat in the living-room talking to Marcia, with his feet in old patent-leather shoes he never could have run in, even if it had not been plain he had not been outdoors at all.

Marcia had evidently not been out spying either, which was a comfort; and Dudley was out of the question, for he sat by the fire, half asleep. But suddenly I had a fright. The girl who entered the living-room five minutes behind me plainly had been out, and I was afraid Marcia would notice her wind-blown hair. I spoke to her as she passed me.

"You're losing a hairpin, on the left side of your head," was all I said; and much I got for it!

My dream-girl tucked in her one flying curl with that sleight of hand women use, and never even looked at me. But the thing was done, and I had covered up her tracks for the third time.

I decided to fire Collins before breakfast next morning and get off to Caraquet right after. But I didn't; and I did not fire Collins either. When I went to the bunkhouse and then to the mine, where he was a rock man, he had apparently fired himself, as Paulette had told him to.

He was nowhere to be found anyhow, nor Dunn either. I wasted an hour hunting round for him, and after that Macartney wanted me, so that it was late afternoon before I could load up my gold and get off. And as I opened the safe in Dudley's office I swore.

There were four boxes of the stuff; small, for easy handling. And if I had had time I would have opened every hanged one of them. Even as it was, I determined to do no forwarding from Caraquet till I knew what something on them meant. For on each box, just as I'd expected even before I heard Paulette Brown say she had marked them, was a tiny seal in blue wax.

Digitized by Google

The reason for any seal knocked me utterly, but I couldn't wait to worry over it. No one else saw it, for I loaded the boxes into my wagon myself, and there was no one about to see me off. Dudley was dead to the world, as I'd known he was gathering up to be for a week past; Marcia, to her fury, had had to retire to bed with a swelled face; and Macartney was the only other person who knew my light wagon and pair of horses were taking our clean-up into Caraquet, except Paulette Brown. And there was no sign of her round. I had not expected there would be, but I was sore all the same: I had helped her out three times, and all I'd got for it was nothing.

I saw Macartney coming up from the mill, and yelled to him to come and hold my horses while I went back to my room for a revolver. It was from sheer habit.

The snow still held off, and there was nothing before me more exciting than a cold drive over a bad road that was frozen hard as a board, a halt at the Halfway stables to change horses, and perhaps the society of Billy Jones as far as Caraquet, if he wanted to go there. The only other human beings I could possibly meet might be some one from Skunk's Misery, though that was unlikely. The denizens of Skunk's Misery had few errands that took them out on roads. So it was mechanically I pocketed my gun. But as I went out again I checked short up in the shack door.

My dream-girl, that I had never been alone with for ten minutes, sat in my wagon, with my reins in her hands!

"My soul," I thought, galvanized. "She can't be—she must be—coming with me to Caraquet!"

V

THE CARAQUET ROAD; AND THE WOLVES HOWL ONCE MORE

Why comest thou to ride with me?
"The road, this night, is dark."
Dost thou and thine then side with me?
"Ride on, ride on, and hark!"
—*The Night Ride.*

THERE she sat, anyhow, alone except for Macartney, who stood at the horses' heads. Wherever she was going, I had an idea he was as surprised about it as I was, and that he had been expostulating with her about her expedition. But if he had, he shut up as I appeared. I could only stammer as I stared at Paulette—

"You—you're not coming!"

"I seem to be," she returned placidly; and Macartney gave me the despairing glance of a sensible man who had tried all he could to head off a girl's silly whim and failed.

"It's as you like," he said to her, not to me. "But you understand you can't get back tonight if you go to Caraquet. And—good heavens, you ought not to go, if you want the truth of it! There's nothing to see, and you'll get half frozen, and you mayn't get back for days if it snows!"

Paulette Brown looked at him as if he were not there. Then she laughed.

"I didn't say I was going to Caraquet! If you want to know all about my taking a chance for a drive behind a pair of good horses, Miss Wilbraham wants Billy Jones's wife to come over for a week and work for her. I'm going to stay all night with Mrs. Jones and bring her back in the morning. She'll never leave Billy unless she's fetched. So I really think you needn't worry, Mr. Macartney," she paused, and I thought I saw him wince; "I'm not going to be a nuisance either to you or Mr. Stretton."

And before he had a chance to answer she started up the horses. I had just time to take a flying jump and land in the wagon beside her as she drove off.

Macartney exclaimed something sharply; and I didn't wonder. If he had not jumped clear the near wheels must have struck him. I lost the sudden startled sentence he snapped out. But it could have been nothing in particular, for my dream-girl only turned in her seat and smiled at him.

I had no smile as I took the reins from her. I had wanted a chance to be alone with her, and I had it. But I knew better than to think she was going even to Billy Jones's for the sake of a drive with me. The only real thought in my head was that behind me, in the back of the wagon, were the boxes of gold she had marked inexplicably with her blue seal, and that I had heard her say to herself the night before that she would have to get hold of that gold.

How she meant to do it was beyond me; and, of course, it was folly to think she ever could do it, with six feet of a man's strength beside her. But nevertheless, when you loved a girl for no other earthly reason than that she was your dream of a girl come true, and even though she belonged to another

Digitized by Google

man, it was no thought to start out on for a lonely drive with her. I set my teeth on it and never opened them for a solid mile over the hummocky road through the endless spruce bush the sun had already sunk behind.

I could feel my dream-girl's shoulder where she sat beside me, muffled in a sable-lined coat of Dudley's. And the sweet warmth of her, the sweeter sense of the faint scent of her gold-bronze hair made me afraid to speak, even if I had known what I wanted to say.

But suddenly she spoke to me:

"Mr. Stretton, you're not angry with me for coming with you?"

"You know I'm not," I said.

But I did not know what I was. Any one who has read as far as this will know that if ever a plain, stupid fool walked this world it was I—Nicholas Dane Stretton. Put me in the bush, or with horses, and I'm useful enough, but with men and women I seem to go blind and dumb. I know I never could read a detective story. The clues and things always made me feel dizzy.

I was pretty well dazed where I sat beside that girl I knew I ought to find out about, and her nearness did not help me to ask her plain questions. If she had not been Dudley's—but I broke the thought short off. I said to myself impersonally that it was impossible for a girl like this to do any monkey business about the La Chance gold with a man like me, yet I wondered if she meant to try.

But she showed no sign of it.

"I had to come with you," she said gently. "Marcia really wants Billy Jones's wife. She is quite sick, and she won't let me wait on her, and, of course, Charliet can't do it. You believe me, don't you? I didn't come just for a drive with you."

I believed that well enough. I nodded.

"Then," said my dream-girl quietly, "will you please stop the horses?"

I looked round me. We were out of sight and hearing of the mine, round a turn where the spruce bush ceased for a long mile of bare swamp, flat, featureless and frozen in the last sunlight. Then, for the first time I looked at Dudley's girl that I was fool enough to love.

"What for?" I demanded bluntly. "I mean, of course—if you like." For I saw she was white to the lips, though her eyes met mine steadily, like a man's. "You don't mean you want to go back, though, do you?"

She shook her head almost absently.

"No. I think there's something bumping round in the back of the wagon. I—" there was a quick, nervous catch in her voice—"want to find out what it is."

I had packed the wagon, and I knew there was nothing in it to bump. But I stopped the horses. I wondered if the girl beside me had some sort of baby revolver, and thought she could hold me up with it if I let her get out; and I knew just what I would do if she tried it.

I smiled as I waited. But she did not get out.

She turned in her seat and reached backward into the back of the wagon, as if she had neither bones nor joints in her lovely body. Marcia was right when she said it was perfectly educated and trained. For a moment I could think of nothing but the marvelous grace of her movement as she slid her hand under the tarpaulin that covered the gold; then I thought I heard her catch her breath with surprise. But she turned back with an exquisite, lithe grace, that made me catch mine, and slid into her seat as if she had never slid out of it.

"It's a—bottle," she said lightly; but it was with a kind of startled puzzle too, as if she had sooner expected dynamite. "I can't think why—I mean I wonder what's in it!"

"A bottle!"

I jerked round to stare at a whisky bottle in her hands. It was tightly sealed, and full of something colorless that looked like gin.

I was just going to say I did not know where it had come from, seeing I'd packed the wagon myself and I would have gone bail no bottle was in it. But it came over me that she might be only pretending astonishment and have put the thing in herself while I was in my room getting my revolver, since there had been no one else near my wagon but Macartney, and he could not have left the horses' heads.

It flashed over me that the baby beside me, being used to Dudley, might have drugged a little gin, thinking I would take various drinks on the way; and I nearly laughed out. But I said:

"Back there was no place for a bottle! It's a wonder it didn't smash on the first bump."

"Yes," said Paulette slowly. "Only I

Digitized by Google

wonder—I mean I can't see—" But she paused, staring at the bottle with a thoughtful sort of frown. "I believe I'll hold it on my lap."

I was looking at the bottle, too, where she held it with both fur-gloved hands; and I forgot to wonder whether she was lying about it or not. For the gloves she wore were Dudley Wilbraham's, as well as the coat, and that any of Dudley's things should be on my dream-girl put me in a black, senseless fury. I wanted to take them straight off her and wrap her up in my own.

I grabbed at anything to say that would keep my tongue off telling her to change coats with me that instant, and the bottle in her hand was the only thing that occurred to me. It brought a sudden recollection back to me, anyhow, and I opened my lips quite easily.

"Scott! That looks like some of the brew I spilled over my clothes at Skunk's Misery!"

"Skunk's Misery!" Paulette exclaimed sharply. "What on earth is Skunk's Misery?"

"A village—at least it's a den—of dirt chiefly; off this road, between Caraquet and Lac Tremblant."

I was thankful to have something to think about that was not her, nor me, nor Dudley. I made as long a story as I could about my stay in Skunk's Misery, when I took home the half-killed boy; and about the filthy-smelling stuff I had spilled on my clothes and how I had seen a wolf carry them off.

"Scott! I suppose he liked the smell, though I never thought of it till now!" I concluded.

"What?" said Paulette in a curious, startled way that might have been wonder or enlightenment. "And you got the stuff at Skunk's Misery—out of a bottle like this! Oh, I ought to have guessed." But either she checked herself, or her pause was absolutely natural. "I ought to have guessed you'd had some sort of a horrible time that night you came home. You looked so tired. But what I meant to say was I don't see how such poor people would have a bottle of anything. Didn't they say what it was?"

"Didn't ask. It looked like gin, and it smelt like a sulphid factory when it got on my clothes. They certainly had that bottle!"

"Well, Skunk's Misery hasn't got this bottle, anyhow."

I could see no reason for the look on her face. It was not gay any more; it was stern, if a girl's face can be stern, and it was white with angry suspicion. Suddenly she laughed rather fiercely:

"I'm glad I thought of it before the jolting broke it in the wagon. I want to get it safely to Billy Jones's."

Why, beat me, since she had pretended she knew nothing of it. So I said nothing. After a long silence Paulette sighed.

"You've been very kind to me, Mr. Stretton," she said as if she had been thinking. "I wish you could see your way to—trusting me."

"I don't see how I've been kind." I left out the trusting part. "I have hardly seen you to speak to till tonight, except—" and I said it deliberately—"the first time I saw you sitting by the fire at La Chance. You did speak to me, then!"

"Was that the first time you saw me?"

It might have been forgetfulness, or a challenge to repeat what she had said to me by the lake in the dark. But I was not going to repeat it. Something told me, as it had told me when I came on her by Dudley's fire—though it was for a different reason, now that I knew she was his and not mine—that I would be a fool to fight my own thoughts of her with explanations, even if she chose to make any.

I looked fair into her face instead. All I could see was her eyes that were just dark pools in the dusk, and her mouth oddly grave and unsmiling; but then and there—and any one who thinks me a fool is welcome to—my ugly suspicion of her died. And I could have died of shame myself to think I had ever harbored it. If she had done things I could not understand—and she had—I knew there must be good reason for them. For the rest, in spite of Marcia and her silly mysteries and for all she belonged to Dudley, she was my dream-girl, and I meant to stand by her.

"That was the first time I spoke to you," I said, as if there had been no pause. "After that I picked up a seal for you, and I told you your hair was untidy before Marcia could. I think those are all the enormously kind things I've ever done for you. But if you want kindness, you know where to come!"

"Without telling you things—and when you don't trust me?"

"Telling things never made a man trust

Digitized by Google

any one," said I. "And besides—" it was so dark now, as we crawled along the side of the long rocky hill that followed the swamp, that I had to look hard to see her face—"I never said I didn't trust you. And there isn't anything you could tell me that I want to know!"

"Oh!" she cried as sharply as if I had struck her. "Do you mean you're taking me on trust, in spite of everything?"

"In spite of nothing," I laughed.

I was not going to have her think I knew about Collins, much more all the stuff Marcia had said. But she turned her head and looked at me with a curious intentness.

"I'll try," she began, in a smothered sort of voice. "I mean I'm not all you've been thinking I was, Mr. Stretton. Only," passionately, and it was the last thing I had expected her to say, "I wish we were at Billy Jones's with this gold!"

I did not, whether she had astonished me or not. I could have driven all night with her beside me, and her arm touching mine when the wagon bumped over the rocks.

"We're half-way," I returned rather cheerlessly. "Why? You're not afraid we'll be held up, are you? Not a human being ever uses this road."

"I wasn't thinking of human beings," she answered simply. "I was thinking of wolves."

"Wolves?"

I honestly gasped it. Then I laughed straight out:

"I can't feel particularly agitated about wolves. I know we had some at La Chance, but we probably left them there, nosing round the bunkhouse rubbish-heap; and, anyhow, a wolf or two wouldn't trouble us. They're cowardly things, unless they're in packs."

I felt exactly as if I were comforting Red Riding Hood, or some one in a fairy tale, for the Lord knows, it had never occurred to me to be afraid of wolves.

"What on earth put wolves in your head?" I asked.

"I—don't know. They seemed to be about lately."

"Well, I never saw any on this road! I've a revolver, anyhow."

"I'm g-glad," said Paulette; and the word jerked out of her, and my arms jerked nearly out of me.

IN THE dark the wagon had hit something that felt like nothing but a boulder in the middle of my decent road. The wagon stopped dead, with an up-ending lurch, and nothing holding it to the horses but the reins, and why on earth they held, I don't know.

For with one almighty bound my two young horses tried to get away from me; and they would have if the reins had not been new ones. As it was, it was a minute before I got them under. When they stood still the girl beside me peered over the front of the wagon into the dark.

"It's the whiffle-tree, I think," she said, as if she were used to wagons.

I peered over myself and hoped so.

"Mercy, if it is," said I. "If it's a wheel, we're stuck here. Scott! I wonder if I've a bit of rope!"

Paulette Brown pulled out ten feet of spun yarn from under her coat, and, if you come to think of it, it was a funny thing for a girl to have. It struck me, rather oddly, that she must have come prepared for accidents.

"There," she laughed, "I expect you can patch us up if I hold the horses. Here's a knife, too, and—" I turned hot all over, for she was putting something else into my hand, just as if she knew I had been wondering about it when first we started; but she went on without a break—"here's my revolver. Stick it in your pocket. I'd sooner you kept it."

I was thankful I had had the decency to trust her before she gave it to me. But I was blazing angry with myself when I got out of the wagon and saw just what had happened.

There was a boulder in the very middle of my new road, that the frost must have loosened from the steep hillside that towered over us, and the front of the wagon had hit it fair and square—which it would not have done if I had been looking at the road instead of talking to a girl who was no business of mine.

I got the horses out of the traces and the pole-straps, and let Paulette hold them while I levered the boulder down the hillside, out of the way. I was afraid to do it, too, for fear they got away from her, but she was evidently as used to horses as to wagons. Bob and Danny stood for her like lambs while I turned to on damages.

Digitized by Google

The pole was snapped and the whiffle-tree smashed, so that the traces were useless. I did some fair jury work with a lucky bit of spruce wood, the whiffle-tree, and the axle, and got the pole spliced. It struck me, even so, that we would have to do the rest of the way to Billy Jones's at a walk, but I saw no sense in saying it.

I got the horses back on the pole, and Paulette in the wagon holding the reins, still talking to the horses quietly, and by name. But as I jumped up beside her the quiet flew out of her voice.

"The bottle!" she all but shrieked at me. "Mind the bottle!"

But I had not noticed she had put it on my seat when she got out to hold the horses. I knocked it flying across her, and it smashed to flinders on the near fore-wheel, drenching it and splashing over Danny's hind legs. I grabbed the reins from Paulette, and I thought of skunks, and a sulphid factory, and dead skunks and rotten sulphid at that.

Even in the freezing evening air the smell that came from that smashed bottle was beyond anything on earth or purgatory, excepting the stuff I had spilled over myself at Skunk's Misery.

"What on earth—!" I began stupidly. "Why, that's that Skunk's Misery filth again!"

Paulette's hand came down on my arm with a grip that could not have been wilder if she had thought the awful smell meant our deaths.

"Drive on, will you," she said in a voice that matched it. "Let the horses go, I tell you! If there's anything left in that bottle it may save us for a—I mean," she caught herself up furiously, "it may save me from being sick. I don't know how you feel. But for Heaven's sake get me out of that smell! Oh, why didn't I throw the thing away into the woods long ago?"

I wished she had. The stuff was on Danny as well as the wheel, and we smelt like a procession of dead whales. For after the first choking explosion of the thing it reeked of nothing but corruption. It was the Skunk's Misery brew all right, only a thousand times stronger.

"How on earth did Skunk's Misery filth get in my wagon?" I gasped; and if I had been alone I would have spat.

"I can't tell you," said Paulette shortly. "Mr. Stretton, can't you hurry the horses? I—Oh, hurry them, please!"

I saw no particular reason. We could not get away from the smell of the wheel, or of Danny. But I did wind the team up as much as I dared with our kind of a pole, and suddenly both of them wound themselves up with a jerk to try any pole. I had all I could do to keep them from a dead run, and if I knew the reason I trusted the girl beside me did not. It had hardly been a sound, more the ghost of a sound. But as I thought it she flung up her head.

"What's that?" she said sharply. "Mr. Stretton, what's that?"

"Nothing," I began, and changed it—"Just a wolf or two somewhere."

For behind us in two, three, four quarters at once, rose a long, wailing howl.

VI

MOSTLY WOLVES, AND A GIRL

Oh, what was that drew screaming breath?
"A wolf that slashed at me."
Oh, who was that cried out in death?
"A man who struck at thee!"
—*The Night Ride.*

THE sound might have come from a country hound or two, baying for sheer melancholy, or after a cat; only there were neither hounds nor cats on the Caraquet road. I felt Paulette stiffen through all her supple body.

She muttered something to herself sharply, as if she were swearing, only afterward I knew better, and put the word she used where it belonged:

"The devil! Oh, the devil!"

I made no answer. I had enough business holding in the horses, remembering that spliced pole. Paulette remembered it too, for she spoke abruptly—

"How fast do you dare to go?"

"Oh, not too fast." My thoughts were still on the pole. "They're not after us, if you're worrying about those wolves."

But she took no notice.

"How far are we from Billy Jones's?"

We were a good way. But I said—

"Oh, a few miles."

"Well, we've got to make it!"

I could feel her queerly rigid against my arm. Still, perhaps it was only because she was listening. But—quick, like life, or death, or anything else sudden as lightning—she had no need to listen; nor had I. A burst

Digitized by Google

of ravening yells, gathering up from all sides of us except in front, came from the dim bush. And I yelled myself at Bob and Danny to keep them off a dead run.

It was rot, of course, but I had a queer feeling the wolves were after us, and that it was just that Skunk's Misery stuff that had started them, like it had drawn the wolf that had taken my clothes. I could hear them yelping out, one after another, into the full-throated chorus of a pack. The woods were full of them.

"I didn't think he'd dare!" Paulette exclaimed, as if she came out of her secret thoughts.

But it did not bring me out of mine, even to remember that young devil, Collins. I had pulled out my gun to scare the wolves with a shot or two—and there were no cartridges in it!

I could not honestly visualize myself filling it up the night before, but I was sure I had filled it, just as I was sure I had never troubled to look at it since. But of course I couldn't have, or it would not have been empty now. I inquired absently, because I was rummaging my pockets for cartridges:

"Who'd dare? Whoa, Bob! What 'he'?"

"They," Paulette corrected sharply. "I meant the wolves. I thought they were cowards. But they don't sound cowardly! I—Mr. Stretton, I believe I'm worried!"

So was I, with a girl to take care of, a tied-on pole and whiffle-tree, and practically no gun; for there was not a single loose cartridge in my pockets. I had been so mighty secure about the Caraquet road I had never thought of them. I cursed inside while I said disjointedly:

"Quiet, Bob, will you? There's nothing to be afraid of—you'll laugh over this tonight."

Because I suddenly hoped so—if the pole held to the Halfway—for the infernal clamor behind us had dropped abruptly to what might have been a distant dog-fight. But at a sudden note in it the sweat jumped to my upper lip.

"Dunn and Collins!" I thought.

They had been missing when we left. Paulette had said she did not trust Collins; and since he had had the *nous* to get hold of the Skunk's Misery wolf dope, he or Dunn could easily have stowed it in my wagon in the night and got caught by it themselves where they had started out to waylay us by the boulder they put in my road. But all I said was—

"The wolves have stopped."

"Not they," Paulette retorted, and suddenly knocked me silly with surprise. "Oh, I haven't done you a bit of good by coming, Mr. Stretton! I thought if I were with you I might be some use, and I'm not."

I stared stupidly.

"D'ye mean you came to fight wolves?"

"No! I came—" but she checked. "I was afraid—I mean I hated your going alone with all that gold, and Marcia really wanted Mrs. Jones."

Any other time I would have rounded on her and got out what she was keeping back, but I was too busy thinking. The horses had quieted to a flying trot up the long hill we had been crawling along the side of when the pole went.

Once over the crest of it we should have done two miles since we heard the first wolf-howl; which meant we were nearer to Billy Jones's than I had remembered. If the pole held to get us down the other side of the long hill there was nothing before us but a mile of corduroy road through a jungle-thick swamp of hemlock, and then the one bit of really excellent going my road could boast—three clear miles, level as a die, straight to the Halfway stables.

"We haven't far now," said I shortly. "And it doesn't matter why you came. You've been useful enough. I couldn't have held the horses and patched the wagon." I left out I could have tied them to a wheel. "But if you're nervous now there's one thing we could do. Can you ride?"

"Ride?" I thought she laughed. "Yes! why?"

"We could cut the horses loose and ride them in to the Halfway."

"What? And leave the gold out here, as we were——"

I knew she cut off "meant to."

"I won't do it!" she declared.

"Wolves wouldn't eat it. And there's no one to steal it," I returned matter-of-factly, because, if Collins had meant to, the sinister flurry behind us had decided me his career was closed. "However, it would be wasting trouble to leave the stuff. There's no sign of any pack after us now." Then a ravening yell cut the words off my tongue.

The brutes must have scoured after us in silence, hunting us in the dark for the last

Digitized by Google

mile. For as we stood out, a black blot on the hilltop against the night sky, they broke out in chorus just behind us, for all the world like a pack of hounds who had treed a wildcat, and too close for any fool lying to occur to me.

"Paulette," I blurted, "there's not a cartridge in my gun! Yours is so little I'm afraid of it. But it may scare them. Take these reins!"

But she turned in her seat and knelt there, looking behind us. If I could have got her on Danny's back and let her run clear five minutes ago, it was impossible now. No human being could have pulled up Bob nor him.

"See them?" I snapped. "By Heaven! I wish the brutes would stop that yelling. They're driving the horses crazy! See them?"

"No. But—yes, yes!" Her voice flashed out sharp as a knife. "They're on us! Give *me* the revolver, quick! I can shoot; and I've cartridges. You couldn't do any good with it; it throws low, and it's too small for your hand. And I wouldn't dare drive. I might get off the road and we'd be done."

It was so true that I did not even turn my head as I shoved over her little gun. I had no particular faith in her shooting, and my trust was in the horses' speed.

We were getting down the hill like a Niagara of galloping hoofs and wheels over a road I had all I could do to see, with that crazy pole I dare not check the horses to put an ounce on. I stood up and drove for all I was worth; and the girl beside me shot —and hit; for a yell and then a screaming flurry rose with every report of her revolver I had thought a toy. It was a beastly noise, but it rejoiced me; till suddenly I heard her pant out a sickened sentence that made me gasp, because it was such a funny thing to say.

"My heavens, I never thought I could be cruel like this—to animals. But I've got to do it. I—" her voice rose in sudden, disjointed triumph—"Mr. Stretton, I believe I've stopped them!"

"I believe you have," I swore blankly, and one leapt out of the dark by the forewheel as I spoke and she shot it.

But it was the last. She had stopped them. And if I had not known that to have turned even so much as one eye from my horses, as we tore down that hill, might have meant we were smashed up on one side of it, I would have been more ashamed than I was of being fought for by a girl.

"You're a wonder—just a marvelous wonder," I got out thickly. "We're clear; and it's thanks to you."

And ahead of us, in the jungle-thick hemlock that crowded the sides of the narrow road I had corduroyed through the swamp for a rickety mile, a single wolf howled.

It had a different, curious note, a dying note, if I had known it; but I did not realize it then. I thought: "We're done! They've headed us!" I said:

"Look out ahead for all you're worth. If we can keep going, we'll be through in a minute."

But Paulette cut out my thought.

"We *are* done, if they throw the horses!"

Instantly, to my amazement, she stood up in that bumping, swaying wagon, as if she were on a dancing floor, and shed Dudley Wilbraham's coat. She leant toward me, and I felt more than saw that she was in shirt and knickerbockers like a boy.

"Keep the horses going as steady as you can, and whatever you do, don't try to stop them. I'm going to do something. Mind, keep them galloping."

I would have grabbed her; only before I knew what she was doing she was past me, out over the dashboard, and running along the smashed pole between Bob and Danny in the dark.

It was nothing to do in daylight. I have done it myself before now, and so have most men. But for a girl in the dark, and on a broken pole, with wolves heading the horses, I was so furiously afraid for her that the blood stopped running in my legs, and it was a minute before I knew she was still safe.

She had not slipped; she was astride Danny, ducking under and outside his rein neatly, for I had not felt a sign of a jerk.

But God only knew what might happen to her if he fell. And suddenly I saw what she had run out there to do. She was shooting ahead of the horses, down the road; then to one side and the other of it, impartially covering them. Only what knocked me was that there was no sign of a wolf either before or beside us in the narrow, black-dark highway, and that she was shooting into the jungle-thick swamp hemlocks on each side of it *at the breast-height of a man.*

And at a single ghastly, smothered yell I burst out:

Digitized by Google

"By ——! It *is* men!"

For I knew she had shot one. I listened above the rattling roll of the wheels over the corduroy, but there was no second cry. There was only what seemed dead silence after the thunder of the wheels on the uneven logs, as we swept out on the dead level road that led straight to the Halfway stable. It was light, too, after the dead blackness of the narrow swamp road.

I saw the girl turn on Danny carelessly, as if she were in a saddle, and wave her hand forward for me to keep going. But the only thought I had was to get her back. Not because I was afraid of a smash, for if the mended pole had held in that crazy, tearing gallop from the top of the hill it would hold till the Halfway. I just wanted her safe beside me. I had had enough of seeing a girl do stunts that stopped my blood.

"Come back out of that," I shouted at her. "I'm going to stop the horses—and you come here!"

She motioned forward, calling back something unintelligible. But before I could pull up the horses, before I even guessed what she meant to do I saw her stand up on Danny's back, spring to his rump, and land lightly in the wagon.

It may be true that I damned her up in heaps from sheer fright. I know I asked fiercely if she wanted to kill herself. She said "no" quite coolly. Only that that pole would not bear any more running on it, nor the jerk of a sudden stop, either; that was what she had called out to me.

"Neither can I bear any more—of tricks that might lose your life to save me and my miserable gold," I said angrily. "Sit down this minute and wrap that coat round you." I had ceased to care that it was Dudley's. "It's bitter cold. And there's the light at the Halfway!"

"What I did wasn't anything—for me," my dream-girl retorted darkly. "And I don't know that it was altogether to save you, Mr. Stretton, nor your gold either, that you thought I meant to steal. I was pretty afraid for myself with those wolves!"

I was too raging with myself to answer. Of course it had not been she who had meant to steal my gold, no matter how she had known some one meant to get at me with wolves or anything else; it had been just Collins—and the sheer gall of the thing jammed my teeth—Collins and Dunn, two ne'er-do-well brats in our own mine!

I had realized already that they had been missing from La Chance quite early enough for me to thank them for the boulder on my good road, and Collins— But I hastily revised my conviction that it was Collins I had heard the wolves chop in the bush as hounds chop a fox. Collins had too much sense. It had more likely been Dunn. He was the kind to get eaten.

Collins must have legged it early for the corduroy road, where Paulette had expected him enough to shoot at him; while Dunn stayed 'round La Chance to put the wolf-bait in my wagon, and got caught by it himself on the way to join Collins. As for the genesis of the wolf-dope, its history came to me coherently as letters spelling a word, beginning with the bottle of mixed filth I had spilt on myself at Skunk's Misery. The second I and my smelly clothes reached shore the night I returned to La Chance a wolf had scented me and howled; had followed me to the shack and howled again while I was talking to Marcia about Paulette Brown; and another had carried off those very clothes under my own eyes, where I stood by my window, as if the smell on them had been some kind of bait it could not resist. Wherever Dunn and Collins had got it, the smell from the broken bottle had been exactly the same, only twenty times stronger; and it had been meant to smash at the boulder on my road and turn me into a living bait for wolves.

The theory may sound crazy, but it happens to be sane. There is a wolf-dope, made of Heaven knows what, except that it is certain ingredients that have to be put in bottles and ripened in the sun for a month. Two Frenchmen were run in this last June in Quebec province for using it round a fish and game club, and endangering people's lives.

That same wolf-bait had been put in my wagon by somebody—and the human cry out of the swamp at Paulette's shot suddenly repeated itself in my ears. I would have grinned if I had not been biting my lip. Paulette had hit the man who was to have put me out of business if the wolves failed when that bottle smashed and the boulder crippled my wagon, and Collins, laid up in the swamp, was to have reaped the gold and me if I got through. The cheek of him made me blaze again, and I turned on Paulette abruptly.

"Look here. Do you know you shot a man in the swamp?"

Digitized by Google

"I hope I killed him," returned that same girl who had disliked being cruel to wolves, and instantly saw what I was after. "That's nonsense, though. There couldn't have been any man there, Mr. Stretton! The wolves would have eaten him."

"Only one got by you," I suggested dryly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"They'd have shot at us—men, I mean!"

I made no answer. It struck me forcibly that Collins certainly would have; unless he was not out for shooting, but merely lying up to remove the gold from my wagon as soon as the wolves had disposed of my horses and me. Even then I did not see why he had held his fire unless he had no gun. But the whole thing was a snarl it was no good thinking about, till the girl beside me owned how much she knew about it.

I wondered suddenly if it had been just that knowledge she was trying to put into Dudley the night I stopped her. The lights at the Halfway were very close as I turned round.

"If I've helped you at all, why can't you tell me all the trouble, Paulette, instead of Dudley?" I asked very low.

I thought she choked back a sob.

"I don't know anything I—can tell. I just thought there might be trouble tonight, but I imagined it would happen before you started. That was why I marked that gold. Don't take any, ever, out of the safe, if it hasn't my seal on it!"

"You can't prevent Collins from changing the boxes forever," I said deliberately; because unless he were dead, as I hoped, she couldn't.

But Paulette stared dead at me, open-lipped, as we drove into the Halfway yard, and Billy Jones ran out with a lantern.

"Collins?" she repeated, as if she had never heard his name, much less met him secretly in the dark. "I don't know anything about any Collins, nor any one I could put a name to. I tell you I don't know who was in the swamp!"

She had not said she did not know who was responsible for the bottle in my wagon. But if I am Indian-dark I can be Indian-silent, too. I said nothing about that.

"Well, it doesn't matter who did anything," I exclaimed suddenly, "so long as there's trust between you and me!"

Because I forgot Dudley and everything but my dream-girl who had fought for me and I suddenly wondered if she had forgotten him, too. For Bob and Danny stood still, played out and sweating, and Paulette Brown sat staring at me with great eyes instead of moving.

But she had forgotten nothing.

"You're very kind—to me and Dudley," she said quietly, and slipped out of the wagon before I could lift her down.

A sudden voice kept me from jumping after her.

"By golly!" said Billy Jones, sniffing at my fore-wheel. "Have you run over a hundred skunks?"

VII

I FIND LITTLE ENOUGH ON THE CORDUROY ROAD, AND LESS AT SKUNK'S MISERY.

I TOLD Billy Jones as much as I thought fit of the evening's work, which included no mention of wolf-dope, nor shooting on the corduroy road.

If he listened incredulously to the tale of a wolf-pack on the road, one look at Bob and Danny told him it was true. They had had all they wanted, and we spent an hour working over them. The wagon was a wreck. Why the spliced pole had hung together to the Halfway yard I don't know, but it had; and I let the smell on it go as a skunk.

I lifted the gold into the locked cupboard where Billy kept his stores. It had to be put in another wagon for Caraquet anyhow, and besides I was not going on to Caraquet the next morning. The gold was safe with Billy, and there were other places that needed visiting first. There was no hope of getting at the ugly business that had brewed up at La Chance through Paulette Brown, or Collins either, since one would never tell how much or how little she knew, and the other would lie, if he ever reappeared.

But the wolf-bait end I could get at, and I meant to. Which was why I sat on one of the horses I had sent over to the Halfway, after my one lesson that it held none, when my dream-girl and Mrs. Jones came out of Billy's shack in the cold of a November dawn.

"I'm riding some of the way back with you," I observed carelessly.

Paulette stopped short. She was lovelier than I had ever seen her, with her gold-bronze hair shining over the sable collar

Digitized by Google

of Dudley's coat. I fancied her eyes shone too, for one second, at seeing me. But there I was wrong.

"I thought you'd started for Caraquet," she exclaimed hastily. "You needn't come with us. There won't be any wolves in the daytime, and—you know there's no need for you to come!"

There was not; even if her voice had not so significantly conveyed the fact that there was no bottle in her wagon this time. Mrs. Billy Jones, to put a hard fact politely, was about the most capable lady I ever met. She was big and rawboned and profane, and usually left Billy to attend to the house while she looked after a line of traps, or hunted bears for their skins. No wolves would worry the intrepid and thoroughly armed Mrs. Jones. But all the same I was riding some way back to La Chance.

There was not a thing to be seen on the corduroy road through the swamp, nor up the hill we had come down on the dead run; and I had not expected there would be. But on top of the hill I bade good-by to my dream-girl; who was not mine, and was going back to Dudley. It was all I could do to do it, too. I did not know I bit my lip till it hurt, and I stopped watching her wagon out of sight and turned back on the business that had brought me.

You could ride a horse down the hill into the swamp if you knew how, and I did. I tied him to a tree and went over each side of the corduroy road on my feet. It was silent as death there in the cold gray morning, with the frost-fog clinging in the somber hemlocks, and the swamp frozen so solid that my moccasins never left a mark. No one else's feet had left a mark there, either, and I would have given up the idea that a man had been cached by the road the night before, if it had not been for two things.

One was a dead wolf with a gash in his throat. The knife had been left in till he was cold; you could tell by the way the blood had clotted around the wound. The other I did not find for a few minutes. But wolves, even live ones, do not stab themselves, and I remembered that the lone wolf-cry ahead of us on that road had been a dying cry, not a hunting one. If Collins had killed him he had waited there long enough to let an hour pass before he took his knife out of the beast's throat; so he had been there when we raced by, which was all I wanted to know, except where he had gone since.

As for the other thing I found, it was behind the hemlocks when I quartered the sides of the road in the silence and the frost-fog, and it was nothing but a patch of shell ice. But the flimsy, crackling stuff was crushed into two cup-like marks, as plainly tell-tale as if I had seen a man fall on his knees in them; and by them, frozen there, were a dozen drops of blood.

I knew angrily that if it were Collins's blood he had not missed it particularly, for he had moved away without leaving a sign of a trail, where to I had no means of knowing; till five minutes later I found another spatter of blood on my corduroy road, and as I looked at it my own blood boiled.

There was not only no one but that young devil Collins who could have lain in wait for me, but he had had the cheek to use my own road to walk away. Where to, beat me; but considering what I knew of his easy deviltry it was probably back to La Chance and a girl who was daring to fight him.

If I was worried for that girl I dared not go back to her. I had to get my gold to Caraquet. Besides, I had a feeling it might be useful to do a little still-hunting around Skunk's Misery. If Collins had had that bottle of devil's brew at La Chance, he had got it from Skunk's Misery, probably out of the very hut where I had once nursed a filthy boy. And I had a feeling that the first thing I needed to do was to prove it.

AS I rode back to Billy Jones's I would have given a deal for any kind of a motor-car that would have reduced the twenty-seven miles to Caraquet into nothing, instead of an all-day job which it proved to be.

Not that I met a soul on the road. I didn't. But it took my wagon four hours to reach Caraquet over the frozen ruts of that same road, and another hour to hand over Dudley's gold to Randall, a man of my own who was to journey with it to the distant railway.

I had no worry about the gold, once Randall had charge of it. No one was likely to trouble him and his coach on the open post-road, even if they had guessed

Digitized by Google

what he convoyed. I was turning away, whistling at being rid of the stuff, when he called me back to take over a bundle of letters to La Chance. There were three for Marcia, and one—in old Thompson's back-number copperplate—for Dudley.

There was nothing for Paulette Brown nor me, but perhaps neither of us had expected any. I know I didn't.

I put the Wilbraham family's correspondence in my inside pocket, left my wagon and horses at Randall's, and started to walk back to Skunk's Misery and the Halfway stables.

It looked a fool thing to do, and I had no particular use for walking all that way, but there was no other means of accomplishing the twenty miles through the bush from Caraquet to Skunk's Misery. Let alone that I had no desire to advertise my arrival, there was no wagon-road to Skunk's Misery. Its inhabitants did not possess such things, nor horses to put in them.

It was black dark when I reached the place, and for a moment I stood and considered it. I had never really visualized it before, any more than you do any place that you take for granted as outside your scheme of existence. I was not so sure that it was, now.

Anyhow, I stood in the gap of a desolate hill and looked into the hollow before me that — added to the dirt no skunk could stand—had earned the place its name. It was all stones, gravel stones, little stones, stones as big as cabs and as big as houses; and, hunched up against them like lean-tos, hidden away among the rocks and the pine-trees growing up from between the rock wherever they could find root-hold, were the houses of the Skunk's Misery people.

There was no pretense of a street nor of a village; there were just houses, if they deserved even that name. How many there were I could not tell. I had never had the curiosity to explore the place. But, if it sounds as if a narrow, stone-choked valley were no citadel for a man or men to have hidden themselves, nor for any one to conduct an industry like making a secret scent to attract wolves, the person who said so would be mistaken. There was never in the world a better place for secret dwelling and villainy and all the rest than Skunk's Misery.

In the first place, you could not see the houses among the rocks. The valley was just like a porcupine warren. No rock stood out alone. They were all messed up together, big and little; with pine-trees growing on the tops of them, and in between them, up from the earth that was twelve, and twenty, and sometimes forty feet below. The whole hollow was a maze of narrow, winding tracks between rocks and under them, sometimes a foot wide and sometimes six, that Skunk's Misery used for roads.

What its citizens lived on, I had never been able to guess. Caraquet said it was on wolf bounties, which was another thing that had set me thinking about the bottle I had spilt on my clothes. If Collins or Dunn had got a similar bottle there I meant to find out about it, and I had the more heart for the thing because Paulette Brown knew nothing of Skunk's Misery. You can tell when a girl has never heard of a place, and I knew she had never heard of that one. I settled down the revolver I had filled up at Billy Jones's, and trod softly down the nearest of the winding alleys over the worn pine-needles in the dark.

There were just twenty houses, when I had found all I could find. There might have been twenty more, under rocks and behind rocks I could not make my way around. But I was no porcupine, and in the dark I could not stumble on any more.

There was not a sign of a stranger in the place, nor a soul about; and, judging from the darkness and the quiet, all the fat-faced, indifferent women were in bed and asleep, and the shiftless rats of men still away. There were no dogs to bark at me; I had learned that in my previous sojourn there. Dogs required food, and Skunk's Misery had none to spare. I went back through the one winding alley that was familiar to me, found the hut where I had nursed the boy, and walked in.

There was not any Collins there, anyhow. The boy and his mother were in bed, or what went for being in bed. But at the sound of my voice the woman fairly flung herself at me, saying that her son was nearly well again, and it was I who had saved him for her.

She piled wood on the fire that was built up against the face of the rock that formed two sides of her house, and jabbered gratitude as I had never thought any Skunk's

Digitized by Google

Misery woman could jabber. And she did not look like one, either; she was handsome—in a haggard, vicious way—and she was not old.

I did not think myself that her son looked particularly recovered. He lay like a log on his spruce-bough bed, awake and conscious, but wholly speechless, though his mother seemed satisfied. But I had not come to talk about any sick boys.

I asked casually where I could find the stranger who had been in Skunk's Misery lately. But the woman only stared at me, as if the idea would not filter into her head. Presently she said dully that there had been no stranger there; I was the only one she had ever seen.

It was likely enough; a Skunk's Misery messenger had more probably taken the wolf-dope to Collins. I asked casually if she had any more of the stuff I had spilt on my clothes, and where she had got it; and once more I ran bang up against a stone wall. The woman explained matter-of-factly that she had not got it from any one. She had found it, standing in the sun beside one of the rocks, and stolen it, supposing it was gin. When she found it was not she took it for some sort of liniment and put it where I had knocked it over on myself.

She had never seen nor heard of any more of it. But of course it might have belonged to any one in the place, only I could understand she could not ask about it, which I did, knowing how precious a whole bottle of anything was in those surroundings. As to where she had found it, she could not be sure. She thought it was by the new house the Frenchwoman's son had built that Autumn and never lived in.

I pricked up my ears. The Frenchwoman's son was one of the men run in down in Quebec province for using wolf-dope, a handsome, elusive devil who sometimes hunted the lumber woods at the lower end of Lac Tremblant, trapping or robbing traps as seemed fit to him, and paying back injuries with such interest that no one was keen to interrupt him. If the Frenchwoman's son were in with Collins in trying to hold up my gold and was at Skunk's Misery now, I saw daylight, anyhow, about the wolf-dope.

But the woman by the fire knocked that idea out of me, half-made. The Frenchwoman's son had not been there for two months past, and had only come there at all to build a house. It was empty now, and no one dared go into it. She could show it to me, but she was sure he had nothing to do with that liniment, if I wanted any more.

After which she relapsed into indifference, or I thought so, till I showed her what little money I had in my pocket. She rose then, abruptly, and led the way out of her hut to the deserted shack that had been built by the Frenchwoman's son.

It was deserted enough, in all conscience. The door was open and the November wind free to play through the place as it liked, as I stood on the threshold, thinking. I had found out nothing about any wolf-bait, excepting the one bottle the Frenchwoman's son might or might not have left there; certainly nothing about Collins ever having got hold of any; and if I had meant to spend the rest of the night at Skunk's Misery I saw no particular sense in doing it.

I had a good idea the boy's mother would not mention I had ever been there, for fear she might have to share what little I had given her—which as it fell out was true—and turned to go. But when the woman had left me to make my own way out of the village, while she crept home in the dark, I altered my mind about going.

I cut off enough pine-boughs to make a bed under me, shut the door of the deserted house—that I knew enough of the Frenchwoman's son to know would have no visitors—had a drink out of my flask, and slept the sleep of the hunting dog till it should be daylight.

And, like the hunting dog, I went on with my business in my dreams; till my legs jerked and woke me to see a waning moon peering in from the west through the hole that served the hut for a chimney, and I rose to go back to Billy Jones's. For I dreamed there was a gang of men in the cellar under the very hut I slept in, with a businesslike row of wolf-bait bottles at their feet, where they sat squabbling over a poker game.

But as I said, it was the waning morning moon that woke me, and the hut was silent as the grave. I picked up the pine-bough bed I had slept on and carried it into the bush with me, far enough to throw it down where it would tell no tales; I did not know why I did it, but I was to be glad; tightened up my belt, and took a short cut

Digitized by Google

through the thick bush to Billy Jones's stables, with nothing to show for my day's and night's work but a dead wolf, a stained bit of shell ice, and a few drops of blood on the logs of my corduroy road.

I was starving, and it was noonday, when I came out of the bush and tramped into the Halfway stables, much as I had done that first time I came from Skunk's Misery and went home to La Chance. Only today Billy Jones was not sitting by his stove, reading his ancient newspaper. He was standing in the kitchen with two teamsters from La Chance, looking down at a dead man.

As I opened the door and stood staring, the teamsters jumped as if they had been shot. But Billy only turned a stolid white face on me.

"My God, Mr. Stretton," he said, stolidly too, "what do you make of this?"

All I could see from where I stood was a rigid hand that had said death to me the second I opened the door. I gave a sort of spring forward. What I thought was that here was the man who had left the blood in the swamp, when Paulette's bullet hit him, and that I had got Collins. I had nearly burst out that what I made of it was that he had what he deserved. But instead I stopped, paralyzed, where my spring had left me.

"My God!" I said in my turn. "I don't know!"

For the man who lay in front of me, stone dead in water-soaked clothes that were frozen to his stark body, was Thompson, our old superintendent, who only six weeks ago had left the La Chance mine; whose letter to Dudley, with its careful, back-number copperplate address, lay in my pocket now.

"It's Thompson!" was the only thing I could say.

VIII

THOMPSON, AND THE BACK OF THOMPSON'S LETTER

> Oh, where Life would have none of me,
> Death laughs, and bids me go!
> But no man hears the thing I tell,
> The thing they do not know.
> —*The Dead Man.*

THOMPSON it was, if it seemed incredible. And Billy Jones exclaimed as he pointed to him:

"He can't have been dead longer than since last night—and I can't understand this thing, Mr. Stretton! It's six weeks today since Thompson left here, and from what he said he didn't mean to come back. He told me he was in a hurry to get away, because he was taking a position in a copper mine in the West. I remember I warned him you hadn't got all your swamps corduroyed, and likely he couldn't drive clear into Caraquet; so he left his wagon here and borrowed a saddle from me to ride over. And a boy brought his horse back next day, or day after—I forget which. I remember Thompson forgot to send me a tin of tobacco he promised to get me off Randall, at Caraquet."

"D'ye mean you think he never went to Caraquet?" It was a stupid question, for of course I knew he had gone there, and further; or he could not have sent Macartney to La Chance, nor a letter to Dudley now. But what I was really thinking of was that I'd been right about the date old Thompson left the mine, and that he had gone over my road on one of the two days I was away with all my road men, getting logs out of the bush.

Billy Jones scattered my thoughts impatiently.

"Oh, he went all right. It's his coming back that beats me!"

It beat me, too, for reasons Billy knew nothing about. Why Thompson had come back was his own business, but it was plain he had been dead a scant twenty-four hours; and the only place I could think of where he had been likely to be killed was on the La Chance road, the night before. Only I did not see how Thompson's clothes could have got water-soaked in a frozen swamp; and I did not see, either, what a decent man like Thompson could have been doing out there like a wolf, with wolves. I had more sense than to think he had had any truck with Collins about our gold. But there he was, and I nodded back at the teamsters:

"Where did they find him?"

"They didn't find him," Billy returned simply. "It was my hound dog. He was yelling down at the lake shore this morning, like he'd treed a wild-cat, and when I went down it was Thompson he'd found—lying right on shore in the daylight! You know how that fool Lac Tremblant behaves. The water in it had gone down to nothing

Digitized by Google

this morning, and on the bare stones it had left—was Thompson. Only I don't see how he ever got there—unless he was coming back, from wherever he'd been outside, by Lac Tremblant instead of the road!"

"Where was his canoe?"

"Didn't have any! But you know that lake. It might have smashed his canoe on him like an egg, and then—just by chance—put him ashore!"

I did know; I had had all I wanted to keep from being smashed myself, the night I crossed it to La Chance. I nodded, and Billy choked:

"It—it kind of sickened me this morning! I liked Thompson, Mr. Stretton."

So had I if I had laughed at his eternal solitaire. Billy and I laid him on his bed decently, after we had done what we could for him. And I was ashamed to have even wondered if he had been the man Paulette had shot at on the La Chance road, for there was not a mark on him, and a fool could have told he had just been drowned in Lac Tremblant.

There was nothing in his pockets to tell how he had got there; only a single two-dollar bill, and a damp pack of cards in a wet leather case. Thompson's solitaire cards! Somehow the things gave me a lump in my throat. I wished I had talked more to Thompson in the long evenings.

The letter in my pocket from him was Dudley's, and I did not mention it to Billy. I said I would try to find out where the dead man had come from, and anything else I could, before he buried him. And with that I left old Thompson lying on Billy's bed, with his face covered, and rode home to La Chance.

When I got in Dudley and Macartney were in the living-room, talking. Any other time I might have wondered why Dudley looked so jumpy and bad-tempered, but all I was thinking of then was my ugly news. But before I could tell it, Dudley flew at me:

"Where the devil have you been all day? And what's happened to my gold?"

I don't know why, but I had a furious, cold qualm that either Dudley or Macartney had found out—I don't mean about Collins so much as about Paulette having been mixed up with him. Till I knew, I was damned if I'd mention him.

"I don't understand," I said shortly. "The gold's in Caraquet. But the reason I didn't get home this morning is that Thompson's back!"

"What?" Macartney never spoke loud yet it cracked out.

I nodded.

"I mean he's dead, poor chap! They found his body in Lac Tremblant this morning." Suddenly I knew I was staring at Macartney. His capable face was always pale, but in one second it had gone ghastly. It came over me that he had known old Thompson all his life, and I blurted involuntarily:

"I'm sorry, Macartney!"

But he took no notice.

"They found Thompson's body," he said heavily, like a man does when he is sick with shock. "Who found it? Why—he wasn't here! What the devil do you mean?"

I told him. Dudley sat and goggled at the two of us, but Macartney stared at the floor, his face still ghastly.

"I beg your pardon, Stretton," he muttered as if he were dizzy. "Only, Thompson was about the oldest friend I had. I thought—" But he checked up and exclaimed with a sudden sharp doubt: "It can't be old Thompson, Stretton! You must be mistaken! He couldn't be here. He was going out West. I was expecting a letter from him any day, to say he'd started."

"It's here. At least I mean there's a letter from him that I got in Caraquet, only it's for Mr. Wilbraham. And I wasn't mistaken, Macartney. I wish I were."

Macartney could not speak. I was surprised. I had not suspected him of much of a heart. I pulled out the letter and Dudley opened it.

"Down and out—the poor old devil," said he slowly, staring at it, "and came back. Well, poor Thompson!"

He read the thing again, and handed it to Macartney. But Macartney only gave one silent, comprehensive stare at it, in the set-eyed way that was the only thing I had never liked about him, and pushed the letter across the table to me.

It was dated and postmarked "Montreal." There was no street address, which was not like Thompson. But its precise phrases, which were like him, sounded down and out all right:

I write to inquire if you will take me back at La Chance. There is no work here, nor anywhere, and the British Columbia copper mine where I

Digitized by Google

intended to go, has shut down. I have nothing else in view, and I am stranded.

If by tomorrow I can not obtain work here, I see nothing between me and starvation but to return to La Chance. I trust you can see your way to giving me work, in no matter how subordinate a position, at least till I hear of something else. If I am obliged to chance coming to you, I will take the shortest route, avoiding Caraquet, and coming by Lac Tremblant.

Yours truly,
WILLIAM D. THOMPSON.

"That's funny," I let out involuntarily; and Dudley snapped at me that it wasn't funny—it was ghastly.

"I don't mean the letter," I said absently. "It's that about Lac Tremblant. Thompson was scared blue of that lake; he used to beg me not to go out on it. And by George, Dudley, I don't see how he could have come that way! He couldn't paddle a canoe."

"What?" said Macartney sharply; he frowned, staring at me. "You're right, he couldn't," he said slowly. "That does make it queer—except that we don't know that he meant to paddle up the lake. He might have intended to walk here along the shore, and strayed or slipped in or something, in the dark. But what troubles me is—can't you see he'd gone crazy? This letter—" he put his finger on it eloquently— "isn't sane, from a self-contained man like Thompson. He must have been off his head with worry before he wrote it, or started back to a place he'd left for."

"Incompetency—if you want the brutal truth of it," Dudley broke in not unkindly. "He was too old-fashioned to make good elsewhere, I expect; and if he found it out I wouldn't wonder if he did go off his head."

I glanced over Dudley's shoulder at the letter he and Macartney were studying. It did not look crazy, with its "Gaskell's Compendium" copperplate and its careful signature. I don't know why I picked up the envelope from where it lay unnoticed on the table beside Dudley, and fiddled with it scrutinizingly, but I did. The outside of it looked all right, with its address in Thompson's neat copperplate. But it wasn't well glued or something, for as I shoved my fingers inside the whole thing opened out flat like a lily.

I looked down mechanically as I felt it go, and by gad! The inside of it didn't look right. There was nothing on the glued-down top flap, but the inside back of the envelope wasn't blank, like it should have been. It wasn't written on in Thompson's neat copperplate, nor in his neat phrases, either. A pencil-scrawl stared up at me, upside down, as I gripped the lower flap of the envelope in my fist unconsciously, under the ball of my big thumb.

"Why, here's some more!" I exclaimed like an ass, glaring at the envelope's inside back. "Take care—something. What's this? What on earth did the old man mean?"

Macartney caught the splayed-out envelope from my hand, so sharply that the flap I didn't know I held tore away, and stayed in my fist as he gazed on the rest of the reversed envelope with his set-eyed stare.

" 'Take care, Macartney! Gold, life—everything—in danger,' " he read out blankly. "Why, it's some kind of a crazy warning to me! Only nobody wants my life, and I've no gold, if that's what he means! I—" But he broke down completely. "Old Thompson must have gone stark mad," he muttered. "I—it makes me heart-sick!"

"I don't know," Dudley snapped unexpectedly. "It fits about the gold, perhaps! Thompson might have suspected something before he left here."

He looked significantly at Macartney, and I remembered the question he had rapped at me when I came in. Something inside me told me to hold my tongue on my adventures on the Caraquet Road till I knew what Paulette had told about them; which I was pretty certain was mighty little. But once again I had that cold fear that Macartney might have found out something about the seal she had put on all our gold, or her talking to Collins in the dark, for the question Dudley flung at me was just what I had been expecting:

"You didn't see anything of Dunn or Collins between here and Caraquet—nor hear from Billy Jones that they'd gone by the Halfway?"

"No," I fenced with a bland, lying truth. "I saw two of our teamsters at the Halfway!"

Dudley shook his head.

"Not them—I knew about them! But Dunn and Collins cleared out the day you left, and I thought—" He broke off irrelevantly. "What the dickens possessed you to take Paulette with you that night?

Digitized by Google

She might have been killed. I heard you'd the dog's own trouble on the road!"

That something inside me stiffened up. Whatever he'd heard, I was pretty certain was not all; and I was hanged if I was coming out with the full story of that crazy journey till I knew whether Paulette came in to it.

I had no desire to talk before Macartney, besides, no matter what he might have found out or guessed; whatever Paulette might have been mixed up in I was not going to have a stern-faced, set-eyed Macartney put her through a catechism about it. Nor Dudley either, for that matter. I had no real voucher for the terms he and Paulette were on, except Marcia's word; and Dudley was no man to trust not to turn on a girl.

"We shot a few wolves, if that's what you mean," I said roughly. "I don't see why that should have worried you about Miss Paulette—nor what it has to do with Dunn and Collins!" Which was a plain lie.

"Few wolves! I know all about them," Dudley retorted viciously. "Billy Jones's wife came over with the truth—that you'd been chased by a pack! And as for what Dunn and Collins had to do with my worrying about the gold with you, it's simple enough. They——"

But he stopped, chewing two fingers with a disgusting trick he had.

"By gad!" He looked up suddenly. "I believe it was them the wolves were after to begin with, Stretton, before they got started on you! And it wasn't what they left La Chance for!"

"What d'ye mean?"

Dudley was chewing his fingers again, but Macartney answered with his usual set-eyed openness.

"The gold," he supplied. "I got an idea those two deserters might have laid up beside the Caraquet road somewhere, to wait for you and get it. I had trouble with them over some drilling the morning you left, and when I went back to the stope, after seeing you and Miss Paulette off, they'd cleared out. They must have gone a couple of hours before you did. They let out something about hold-ups while I was having the trouble with them, and Wilbraham and I got worried they might have got over the road before you and be lying up for you somewhere."

"They only left two hours before I did," said I, with flat irrelevance.

I must have stared at Macartney like a fool, but he had knocked the wind clean out of me about Collins having been the man in the swamp. With only two hours' start neither he nor Dunn, nor any man for matter of that, could have legged it over in time to lie up in the only place I knew some one had lain up—on the corduroy road.

"Well, they didn't get me, and I never saw them," I began, and suddenly remembered that ghastly noise, like the last flurry of a dog-fight, that had halted the wolves on my track.

My first thought of it, and of Dunn and Collins, had been right.

"By gad! I believe I heard them, though, and if they were on that road they're killed and eaten!" I exclaimed. "But I didn't have any trouble about the gold!"

It was true to the letter, for my side had attended to all the trouble, if my side was only a girl who would not have shot without need. But when I explained the noise that might have accounted for Dunn and Collins, Dudley shook his head.

"They didn't get eaten—not they! And your having no trouble with the gold isn't saying you won't have any. If no one saw Dunn and Collins going out to Caraquet, I bet they're laid up somewhere, waiting for your next trip. And as if that wasn't worry enough, poor old Thomspon has to go out of his mind and come back here to be found dead, and I mean to find out how!"

He was working himself up into one of his senseless rages, and he turned on Macartney furiously:

"You knew him before I did! Write to his people and find out how he got here, anyhow. I'm not going to have any man come back, and just be found dead, like a dog, if it is only old Thompson. I'm going to have him traced, from the time he left Montreal!"

"He had no people," said Macartney blankly. "As far as I know, he was just a bit of driftwood. And as for finding out anything about his journey, I don't suppose we ever can! All we'll get at will be he came back—and was found dead."

And something made me look past him and Dudley, sitting with their backs to the living-room door, and the blood came into my face.

Digitized by Google

Paulette Brown stood in the doorway, motionless, as if she had been there some time. I didn't know if she was merely knocked flat about the wolves and Collins, or afraid Macartney might have found out something about her. But she was staring at Macartney's unconscious back as you look at a chair or something, without seeing it; and, if he was pale, she was dead white, except her mouth that was arched to a piteous crimson bow, and her eyes that looked dark as pools of blue ink. But she did not speak of Dunn nor Collins.

"Do you mean *Thompson's* been found dead—that quiet man who was here when I came?" she stammered, as if it choked her. And I had an ungodly fright she was going to say she must have shot him on the corduroy road.

"Billy Jones found him drowned in Lac Tremblant—it was an accident!" I exclaimed sharply, before she could come out with more about shooting, and wolf-bait, and perhaps herself, than I chose any one to know, till I knew it first.

And I saw the blood flash into her face as it had flashed into mine at the sight of her.

"Oh, I thought Mr. Macartney meant he'd been—murdered," she returned faintly. "I'm—glad. But, if he had been, I suppose it would be sure to come out."

"Crime doesn't always come out, Miss Paulette," said Macartney grimly.

But Paulette only answered listlessly that she was not sure; one never could tell. And she moved to her usual seat beside the fire.

I was knocked endways about Collins, and who could have been on the corduroy road if he had not. I would have given most of the world for ten minutes alone with my dream-girl, and explanations. But Dudley began the whole story of Thompson over again, and Macartney stood there, and Marcia—whom I had not seen since she went to bed with a swollen face—came in, dressed in her hideous green tweed, and stood on tiptoe to chuck me under the chin, with a:

"Hullo, Nicky, you're back again!"

There was no earthly hope of speaking to my dream-girl alone. I shoved the mystery of Collins into the back of my head and went off to my room. Before I remembered, I was still holding that torn-off flap of poor old Thompson's envelope, unconsciously, in my shut fist. I dropped it on the floor and grabbed it up again, to stare at it for a full minute. Because there was writing on it, too.

"For God's sake, search my cards—my cards—my cards," Thompson had scrawled across the three-cornered envelope flap Macartney's grab had left in my hand; and, knowing Thompson, it was pitiful. He was the sort who must have been crazy indeed, before he spoke of the Almighty and cards in the same breath.

I remembered taking his measly solitaire pack out of his pocket at the Halfway, and wished I had brought them along with me, but it was simple enough to go and get them from Billy Jones. Meantime I had no desire to speak to Macartney of them, nor the scrawled torn-off flap from Thompson's envelope. He was sick enough already about old Thompson's aberration, without any more proofs of it.

It hurt even me to remember I had always laughed at the poor devil and his forlorn cards. I had no heart to burn the scrap off his envelope, either, while poor Thompson lay unburied. I put it away in my letter-case and locked it up.

Which seemed a tame ending. I had not sense enough to know it was not tame at all.

IX

TATIANA PAULINA VALENKA

BUT poor old Thompson seemed a closed incident. There was nothing to be found out about him, even regarding his departure from La Chance. Nobody remembered his going through Caraquet, nor even the last time he had been there. He was not a man any one would remember about, anyhow, nor one who made friends.

We put a notice of his death, and the circumstances, in the Montreal papers, and I thought that was the end of it, till Dudley, to my surprise, stuck obstinately to his idea of tracing Thompson from Montreal. He told Macartney and me that he had written to a detective about it, and I think we both thought it was silly. I know I did; and I saw Macartney close his lips as if he kept back the same comment.

But we gave old Thompson the best funeral we could, over at the Halfway; with a good grave and a wooden cross. All of us went but Marcia. She said she had never

Digitized by Google

cared about the poor old thing, and she wasn't going to pretend.

It was a bitter day, with no snow come yet. Macartney looked sick and drawn about the mouth as he stood by the grave, while Dudley read the prayers out of Paulette's prayer-book. I saw her notice Macartney when I did, and I think neither of us had guessed he had so much feeling.

I stayed a minute or two behind the others, because I'd ridden over instead of driving with them, and just before I started for La Chance I remembered that torn scrap of paper in my room there. And I turned round to Billy Jones.

"Those solitaire cards of Thompson's," said I—from nothing on earth but that to find them had been the last request of the dead man, if it did sound crazy—"I'd like them."

Billy nodded, and went into his shack. Presently he came out and said the cards were gone. He thought he'd put them somewhere, but they weren't to be found. It was queer, too, because he remembered putting them back in their prayer-book sort of looking case, after he'd spread them by the stove to dry with Thompson's clothes. But his wife said she'd find them and send them over.

Which she never did, and I forgot them. Goodness knows I had reason to. I did an errand instead of going straight home from Thompson's funeral, that took me into the bush not far from where the boulder had been laid on my road.

It was there or near there that I had heard wolves pull down a man, or men. And after I'd tied my horse and done a little looking round, I found the spot. It was not the scattered bones of two men that sickened me, nor even that the long thighs and shanks of one of them were the measure of Collins. It was the top of a skull, with the hair still on it, and I didn't need the face that was missing.

Dunn, with his eternal chuckle, had had stubbly fair hair, without a part in it, clipped close till it stood on end—and there was the same hair on the top of the skull that lay like a round stone in the frozen bush. Whether the two had set out to rob me I didn't know. I did know they had not done it, and that the man Paulette had shot at in the swamp was more of a mystery than ever.

The ground was too hard to do any burying; I made the bones into a decent heap and piled a decenter heap of rocks over them, beginning with boulders I could just move. If I said a kind of prayer too, it was no one's business but that of the God who heard me. The boys had been young, and they were dead while I lived, which was enough to make a man pray. Besides, I had a feeling that it was decent.

But when I got home to La Chance the bald story I told Dudley was wasted. He swore at me for a fool first, for burying two skulls with no faces, and imagining they belonged to Dunn and Collins; and next that they were still alive, and meaning to run a hold-up on us. From where, or how, he couldn't say. But he kept on at the thing; and the minute he had half a drink in him—which was usually about eight in the morning—he began to worry me to go and find out where they were cached, and hike them out of it; and he kept at it all day.

That wouldn't have worried me particularly, since it was only Dudley, and Macartney and the others believed what I said; but everything else began to go crooked at La Chance that week, and everybody's nerves got edgy. Marcia was sort of snappy all round, except when Macartney was there, when she sat in his pocket and they talked low, the way people do—only that I was always idiotically nervous they might be talking about Paulette Brown. That was seldom enough though, for half the time Macartney never showed up, even to meals. He was working like ten men over the mine, and good solid, capable work at that. Whatever chance had made poor Thompson send him to us, he was worth his weight in the gold he was getting out of La Chance in—well, in chunks—which was one of the reasons he had to work so hard, and brings me to the naked trouble at La Chance.

We were deadly short of men. Not only were Dunn and Collins dead, but their grisly end seemed to have scared the others. Not a day went by but three or four of them did not come for their time, and chiefly and—well, let alone that the bones and skull I'd buried had smashed up my theory that it was only Collins who'd meant to hold up my gold, I'd smashed it up for myself, for a reason that made me wild: Paulette Brown whose real name Marcia swore was something else, was still meeting a man in the dark! Where, I

Digitized by Google

couldn't tell, for there was no snow to betray her steps; but I knew she did go, and naturally I knew the man was not Collins, nor ever had been.

I did my best to get a talk with her, but she ran from me like a rabbit. I was worried, good and hard; for, from what I'd picked up, and sneaked out, I knew the man she met could be nobody at La Chance. And any outsider who'd followed her there likely had a gang with him and meant business, not child's play like Collins.

The thing was serious, and I had no right to be trusting my dream-girl and keeping silence to Dudley, but I went on doing it. There is no sense in keeping things back. I was mad with love for her, and if she had given me a chance I would have brushed Dudley out of my way like a straw. I had to shut my teeth and grip all the decency I had, not to do it anyway.

But if you think I just made an easy resignation of her to him, and sat back meekly, you're wrong. I sat back because I was helpless, and too stupid to formulate any way to deal with the situation.

I don't know that I was any more silent than I always am, though Marcia said so. I did get into the way of pretending to write letters in the evenings, while Marcia and Macartney talked low, and Dudley went up and down the room in his eternal trudge of nervousness, throwing a word now and then to Paulette, sitting sewing by the fire that I kept my back to, so that the others could not see my face.

But one night, nearly a month after Thompson was buried, I came in after supper, and Paulette was in my usual place. She was writing away at a letter or something, and Dudley was preaching to Macartney about the shortage of men in the bunkhouse. Marcia, cross as two sticks because she was only there to talk to Macartney herself, had Paulette's seat by the fire.

I sat down close to the end of the table where Paulette was writing, and closer by Paulette—more sideways than behind her.

IF I had chosen to look I could have read every word she was writing. But naturally I was not choosing to, for one thing; for another, my eyes were glued to her face the second I sat down. And something in the look of her gave me a sick shock.

She was deadly pale, and under the light of Charliet's half-trimmed lamp I saw the blue marks below her eye and the tight look round the nostrils that only comes to a woman's face when she is fighting something that is pretty nearly past her, and is next door to despair. She looked hunted—that was the only word there was for it.

It struck me that look must stop. If I had to march her out into the bush by force in the morning, I meant to get a solitary talk with her, find out what her mysterious business was at La Chance with a man who had lain up for our gold, and, with any luck, transfer the hunted look to the face of the man who was hounding her, for I knew well enough he was still hanging round La Chance.

After that—but there would be no after that to matter to me, with a girl who scooted to Dudley each time I tried to speak to her. I took a half glance at him, and it was plain he would be no good to her in the kind of business that was on now. I couldn't *have* her, for she didn't want me; but it was up to me to help her, or no one.

She was sweet to Dudley, heaven knew, and he was good to her when he was himself. When he was not, he had a patronizing, half-threatening way of speaking to her as if he knew something ugly about her, as Marcia had insinuated he did, that made me boil. She never resented it either, and that made me boil too.

If I had ever seen her even shrink, I don't know that the curb-bit I had on myself would have held. I wished to heaven she would shrink and give me a chance to step in between her and a man who might love her, as Marcia said, but who loved drink and drugs better, or he would not have been talking between silliness and sobriety, as he was that night. And I was so busy wishing it that Marcia spoke to me three times before I heard her.

"Nicky, do make Dudley shut up," she repeated, "he won't let any one else speak! He's been preaching the whole evening that Collins and Dunn aren't dead—only laid up somewhere round and making the other men desert, and you ought to go and find them; and now he's worrying us about that old idiot Thompson who got himself drowned! For Heaven's sake tell him no one would have bothered to murder the old wretch!"

"Nobody ever thought he was murdered,

Digitized by Google

and I buried Dunn and Collins right enough," said I absently, with my thoughts still on Paulette. But Dudley whisked round on me.

"Marcia's talking rot!" he exclaimed, his little pig's eyes soberer than I expected. "I don't mean about those two boys, for I bet they're no more dead than I am, and it would be just like them to lie low and set up a smothered strike among the men, as soon as you were ass enough to be taken in by some stray bones! But I do mean it about Thompson. There's no sense in saying there was nothing queer about the way he came back and was found dead—because there was! It was natural enough that the police couldn't trace him in Montreal, for I hadn't a sign of data to give them; but it's darned unnatural that *I* can't trace him in Caraquet! I've sieved the whole place upside down, and nobody ever saw Thompson after he left Billy Jones's that morning on his way to Caraquet!"

Macartney stared at him for a minute; then he put down the pipe he was smoking.

"If I thought that, I'd sieve the whole place upside down, too," he said so quietly that I remembered Thompson had been his best friend, and that he had looked deadly sick beside his grave. "But I don't. What it comes to with me is that no one remembers seeing Thompson in Caraquet that particular time, but no one says he wasn't there!"

"Then where's the——"

But Dudley checked himself quick as light. If I had been quite sure he was himself I should have been curious about what he had meant to say. But all he substituted was—

"Well, nobody remembers seeing him that day anyway, except Billy Jones!"

"Seems to me that narrows poor Thompson's potential murderers down to Billy Jones," said Macartney ironically, since Billy Jones would not have murdered the meanest yellow pup that ever walked, and Macartney knew it as well as I did. But Dudley made the two of us sit up.

"Who's to say he didn't?" he demanded. "What darned thing do we know about him to say that he mightn't have waylaid poor old Thompson for what money he had on him, and kept him shut up till he had a chance to say he found him drowned?"

Macartney and I stared at each other. The very thought was so monstrous that it must have struck him, as it did me, that it was born of Dudley's drugs and not his intelligence. But it had to be stopped, or Heaven knew whom Dudley would be accusing next.

"For God's sake, Wilbraham, shut up!" said Macartney curtly. "You make me sick. Isn't it enough to have the old man dead, without saying innocent people killed him?"

"Yes, if they are innocent," Dudley returned so quietly that it surprised both of us. "But I tell you this, Macartney, and Stretton too: if anyone within a hundred miles of this mine did murder Thompson, Billy Jones or any one else, it'll come out!" And he jerked his head round. "Don't you think so, Paulette?"

"I? I never thought of poor old Thompson having been murdered!" she answered as if she were startled, but she did not turn. "I think it will be found out, if he was murdered," she added unexpectedly.

She had made two false starts at her letter and torn them up, but she had evidently finished it to her liking now, for she sat with the pen poised over the blank end of the sheet to sign her name. Yet she did not sign it. She only sat there abstractedly, with her hand lifted from the wrist.

"There, you see," Dudley crowed triumphantly. "Paulette's no fool. It's facts she and I are after, Macartney. Why, you take the history of crimes generally, murders, jewel robberies, kidnaping for money, half of them with not nearly so much to them as this thing about Thompson—they're always found out!"

"If you're going to talk this rubbish, I'm going to bed," Marcia burst out wrathfully.

I saw her pause to catch Macartney's eye, but for once his set gaze was on the floor. She got up, which I don't think she'd meant to, and flounced out of the room. I had no idea I was going to be deadly thankful.

Macartney answered Dudley as the door shut behind her.

"I don't know what crimes are always found out, in spite of your faith—and Miss Paulette's," he argued half-crossly. "I could remind you both of one or two that weren't. What about the Mappin murder, 'way back in Nineteen Five? And that emerald business at the Houston's country house this Spring, with that dancing and

Digitized by Google

circus-riding girl who used to be at the Hippodrome—the Russian, who did Russian dancing on her horse's back? What was her name? I ought to remember—I knew a poor devil of a cousin of hers out in British Columbia, who was engaged to her when it happened, and he talked about her enough. Oh, yes, Valenka! She had a funny Christian name too, sort of half Russian, only I forget it. But when that Valenka girl got away with an emerald necklace from the Houstons' house, no one ever found out how it was done! You must have heard about her, Stretton?"

I had. Every one had—Macartney need not have troubled to hunt his memory for her Christian name, though it had only reached me in the wilderness through a stray New York paper. But before I could say so Dudley burst out with the same truculence he had used about Billy Jones—

"What d'ye mean, Stretton must have heard?"

"Only that Mrs. Houston took a fancy to Valenka, and had her down to dance and ride at a week-end party at her house in Long Island; that on Sunday morning, Jimmy Van Ruyne, who was one of the guests, was found in Valenka's room, soaked with morphine and robbed—not only of the cash in his pocket in the good old way, but of an emerald necklace he'd just bought at Tiffany's; and that, to this day, no one has ever laid eyes on that necklace nor on Valenka. She's free and red-handed somewhere, if no one ever found out who railroaded her and Van Ruyne's emeralds out of the United States!"

What sent Dudley into a blazing rage was beyond me. But he fairly yelled at Macartney.

"Free she may be, but when you say 'red-handed' you say a lie! If Jimmy Van Ruyne was fool enough to think so it was because no Van Ruyne ever could see a-b spelled ab. D'ye know him? Well—" as Macartney shook his head—"he's a rotter if ever there was one! Got more money than he knows what to do with, and always chasing after women. As for Valenka, if you think she came out of a circus and was fair game, that's a lie, too! She was a lady, born and bred. Her mother was American, a Miss Bocqueraz; and her father one of the best-known men in Petrograd, and *persona grata* with one of the Grand Dukes, till he got into some sort of political disgrace and died of it.

"His daughter came to America and danced and rode for her living, first because she was beggared; and second because she'd been taught dancing in the Imperial School at Petrograd, and riding in the Grand Duchess Tatiana's private ring for *haute manége*. And she was a corker at both. She called herself plain Valenka, and Jimmy Van Ruyne went crazy about her, though Mrs. Houston didn't know it, or she would never have asked the nasty little cad to a Spring week-end party!"

"To lose an emerald necklace and be stabbed and drugged," commented Macartney dryly. "Oh, I'm not saying Valenka wasn't a marvelous sight on a horse! But what Van Ruyne told the police was that he gave his string of emeralds to her on the Saturday afternoon, and got a note from her just after dinner saying that she returned them; only the case—in the time-honored method this time—was empty when he opened it.

"He was blazing! He went straight to Valenka's room when he found it out, which was at two in the morning, and said he wanted his emeralds, and she flew at him with a dagger. After which he knew nothing at all till a servant came in next morning and found him lying unconscious in her empty room, that she'd just walked out of with his emeralds in her pocket. And no one's ever laid eyes on her, or Van Ruyne's emeralds since."

"That's what Van Ruyne says," Dudley began hotly, and went on in a different voice. "The Valenka girl never stole his emeralds. She might have cut him across the wrist with one of those knife-things women will use for paper cutters; I don't say she didn't. Any girl would have been justified, when a man forced his way into her bedroom—for I bet Van Ruyne didn't let out the whole story of that, if he did let out that he bullied her when he found her alone. And he didn't lay any stress, either, on the fact that he was found with the cut artery in his wrist—that was all the stabbing that ailed him—bound up like a surgeon might have done it; nor that he'd been given just enough morphine to keep him from wriggling off his bandage and bleeding to death before any one came—not Van Ruyne!"

"All that doesn't explain how she got

Digitized by Google

away, nor what became of her," said Macartney obstinately. "That's the mystery I began on!"

I was bored stiff with the whole thing. And, whether she had Van Ruyne's emeralds or not, I saw no particular mystery in the Valenka girl's disappearance; she had probably had some one outside who had taken her clear away in a motor-car. I said so, more because Dudley was glaring at Macartney like a maniac than anything else. And Dudley caught me up short:

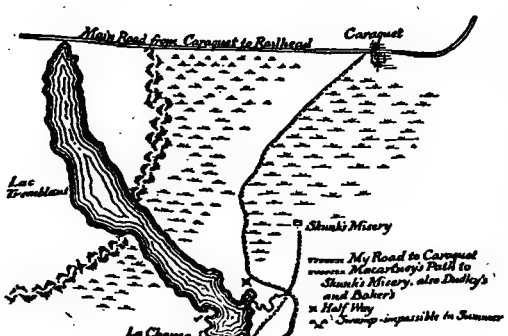
"I won't have either of you say one more word about Valenka in my house. She was as good as she was pretty; and if some one helped her away she deserved it!"

There was something so like honest passion in the break in his voice that involuntarily I glanced at Paulette, to see if by any chance she was startled at Dudley's evidently intimate knowledge of a girl none of us had even heard him speak of; and it took every bit of Indian quiet I owned not to stare at her so hard that Dudley and Macartney must have noticed.

She was listening, as motionless as if she were a statue. She sat as if she had been struck dumb.

Then the carved lines of her poised hand fell to the level of her wrist that lay flat on the table, and she began to write the signature to her unfinished letter. I could see every separate character as she shaped it; and only a merciful heaven kept my wits in my skull and my tongue quiet in my head.

For the signature she wrote as plainly as I write it now was not Paulette Brown. It was Tatiana Paulina—that "queer Christian name, half Russian too," of the dancing circus-rider, that no one had ever mentioned—Tatiana Paulina Valenka.


Main Road from Corsquet to Railroad
Corsquet
Lac Tremblant
Shunk's Misery
My Road to Corsquet
Macartney's Path to Shunk's Misery, also Dudley's and Baker's
Half Way Swamp impassible in Summer
La Chance

X

I INTERFERE FOR THE LAST TIME

Must I go now—in the moonlight clear?
Would God that it were dark,
That I might pass like a homeless hound
Men neither miss nor mark.
—*The Ransom.*

TATIANA PAULINA VALENKA!

I sat as still as if I had been stabbed. It was no wonder she had laughed when I asked her if she could ride, no wonder I had thought she moved like Pavlowa. Paulette Brown, whom Dudley had brought to La Chance, was Tatiana Paulina Valenka, who had or had not stolen Van Ruyne's emeralds. But the blood sprang into my face at the knowledge, for—by all the holy souls and my dead mother's name—she was my dream-girl, too! And I believed in her.

All the same I was thankful Marcia had flounced out of the room before Dudley let loose. It was no wonder she thought she had seen Paulette Brown before. The wonder was that she had ever forgotten how she had seen her, dancing at the Hippodrome on her four horses as no girl ever had danced, or forgotten the story about her that she had said was "queer!"

If Marcia's eyes had fallen on the signature mine were on now, I knew her first act would have been to write to Jimmy Van Ruyne; that even if she had only heard Dudley defending an ostensibly absent Valenka she would have written, for Marcia was no fool.

Then and there I made up my mind that Marcia should never guess the whole of what she already half-guessed about Paulette Brown. There were ways I could stop that.

As for Dudley—but a sudden tide of respect for Dudley, in spite of his drink and all his queerness, rose flood-high in me. It had been Dudley, of course, who had got Paulette away, for I could not think of her as Tatiana Paulina. How, I didn't guess; I knew he had not been one of the Houstons' week-end party; but he had done it somehow, and spirited Paulette out to La Chance, and all the rest of it.

As for the rest, a fool could have told that he respected and believed in her. If it had been risky bringing Marcia out into the wilderness with her, it had been clever, too, because it was so bold that Marcia had never suspected it. Even I never would

Digitized by Google

have, if Macartney had not brought up the Valenka's name.

I knew he had done it merely to get Dudley off his cracked idea that Billy Jones might have murdered Thompson, but I was suddenly nervous that Dudley's fool vehemence over a missing girl might have set Macartney on the track of things, and Heaven knows that, except he was a competent mine superintendent, I knew little enough of how far it would be safe to trust Macartney.

But suddenly one thing I did know flashed over me. Macartney and Marcia were a firm, or going to be; and I was instantly scared blue that he might turn round and see that name Paulette Brown had signed to her letter lying plain under the living-room lamp. I knew I had to wake Paulette up to what she had done and shut up Dudley before he let out any more intimate details the public had never known, like Van Ruyne's bandaged wrist. I yawned and got up, with one hand on the table, and my forefinger pointing straight to that black signature of Tatiana Paulina Valenka, that ought to have been Paulette Brown.

"I'm like Marcia, Miss Paulette; I'm going to bed unless you can turn off Dudley's eloquence. Oh, I'm so sorry—I'm afraid I've blotted your letter," I said.

I tapped my finger on it soundlessly, and she looked down—and saw.

I said once before that my dream-girl had good nerves; she had iron ones. I need not have been afraid she would exclaim. She said quite naturally:

"No, it's all right. And it wasn't a letter, anyhow. It was only something I wanted to make clear."

She picked it up, folded it small, gathered up the bits of paper she had written on and torn up, and turned round to Dudley.

"What are you talking about all this time?"

But if her glance warned him to hold his tongue, as Heaven knows her mere presence would have warned me, Dudley was too roused to care.

"I was talking about that liar, Van Ruyne," he said, glaring at Macartney.

"He may be a liar, all right," said Macartney rather unpleasantly. "Only, if that Valenka girl didn't steal his emeralds, Mr. Wilbraham, who did?"

"That cousin of hers you said you knew —Hutton, or whatever you said his name was," Dudley retorted, like a fool, for Macartney had never mentioned the man's name. "How, I don't know, but I'm certain of it. He was more in love with her than Van Ruyne, and more dangerous, for all you say he was a good sort. Why, he was the kind to stick at nothing. Valenka had had sense to turn him down hard; and I believe he stole that necklace of Van Ruyne's from her during the short time she had it—either just to get her into trouble and be revenged on her, or to get her into his power. Whichever it was—to blackmail her, for he'd cadged on her for money before her father died, or to scare her into going to him for help—I'd like to hunt the worthless hound down for it. And I'd never stop till I got him!"

"Like poor old Thompson's murderer," said Macartney rather dryly, "and with no more foundation."

But the thought of Thompson seemed to have brought his self-command back to him. He tried to smooth Dudley down. "I don't honestly believe old Thompson could have been murdered," he said gently, "nor that your Valenka's cousin could have stolen those jewels, for any reason. He seemed a pretty good sort when I knew him in British Columbia. He was a clever mining engineer, too."

"He might have been the devil for all I care! Only if ever I come across him I'll get those emeralds out of his skin!" Dudley exploded.

Paulette gave one glance at him. It would have killed me; and even Dudley saw how he was giving himself away to a stranger.

"Why the devil do you work me up about abstract justice, Macartney?" he growled. "You know I lose my temper. Talk about something else, for Heaven's sake!"

"Not I! I'm going to bed," Macartney returned casually.

Dudley always did work himself up over things that were none of his business, and the Valenka argument had evidently not struck his superintendent as anything out of the ordinary. He nodded and turned away. Paulette strayed to the fireplace, and I saw her handful of papers blaze up before she moved away. I was thankful when that signature of Tatiana Paulina Valenka was off the earth, even if Macartney had gone out of the room. Paulette

Digitized by Google

said good night and went out at his heels.

I heard Macartney ask her something as she passed him where he stood in the passage, getting on his coat to go over to the assay office where he slept. I thought it was about Marcia, from the tone of his voice, and from Paulette's answer, cursory and indistinct through the closed door—

"I know; I'm going to."

She added something I could not hear at all, but I heard Macartney say sharply that tomorrow would be too late.

Paulette said "yes," and then "yes" again, as if he gave her a message. Then she spoke out clearly:

"There's nothing else to say. I'll do it now."

I heard her move away, I thought to Marcia's door. Macartney went out the front door, banging it.

I HAD no desire to go to bed. I felt as if I had walked from Dan to Beersheba and been knocked down and robbed on the way. I knew my dream-girl was not mine, now nor ever, because she was Dudley's, but I had never thought of her being anything like Tatiana Paulina Valenka.

It was not the jewel story that hit me. I knew she had not stolen Van Ruyne's old necklace, no matter how things looked. It was that she must care for Dudley, or she would never have let him bring her out here. And another thing hit me harder still, and that was Hutton, the cousin Macartney said was engaged to her, and Dudley said cadged on her, till he ended by branding her as a thief and getting away with the spoils. And the thought that jumped into my head, without any earthly reason, was that it was just that Hutton who had been hounding her at La Chance; that, while I had been addling my brains with suspecting Collins, it was Hutton that PauletteBrown, whose real name was Valenka, had stolen out to meet in the dark.

Once I thought of it I was dead sure Hutton had followed her to La Chance. I knew from my own ears that she hated and distrusted the man for whom she had once mistaken me; that it was he from whom she had tried to protect my gold. And I wondered, with a horror that made me too sick to swear, if it were Hutton himself, and not Dunn nor Collins, who had cached that wolf-dope in my wagon. If it were, he had not cared about wolves killing the girl who drove with me so long as he got my gold.

But there I saw I was making a fool of myself, for he could not have known she was going. I steadied my mind on the thing, like you steady a machine.

If Hutton had been hanging 'round La Chance, either from so-called love, or to get Paulette into a mess with our gold, as Dudley swore he had with Van Ruyne's emeralds, he could not have been seen about the mine, for Macartney would have recognized him and given him away. He must be cached in the bush somewhere, waiting his chance to grab our gold and incriminate Paulette, as common sense told me she expected.

I was sure as death he had a gang somewhere, for no outsider would try to run that business alone; Collins and Dunn might have been on their way to join it the night they got scuppered, very likely. They were just devils enough. But if they had cleared out to meet Hutton at my corduroy road, they had never got there, and I was pretty sure the rest of the gang hadn't either, and Hutton, alone, had been afraid to shoot at us and give himself away.

That thought assured me of two things. It was Dunn and Collins who had hidden the wolf-bait in my wagon, for Hutton could never have done it and reached the corduroy road before us; and Paulette must really hate Hutton savagely, for she must have known who she was shooting at on my swamp road. That made me feel better, a little, but there was something I wanted to know. I turned on Dudley for it.

"Look here, I never heard anything about Valenka but newspapers stories till tonight. But if you know the inside of the business, how did that cousin Macartney was talking of ever get hold of that emerald necklace? Didn't Macartney imply he was working in British Columbia?"

"He was more likely anywhere than where he'd have to work—if he could get money out of a girl," Dudley snapped. "What I think is that he was masquerading as a servant in the Houstons' house—a chauffeur, perhaps, anything that would let him hang round—the night she stayed there. He was a plain skunk. I don't know how he managed the thing, but I know he was there in the Houston house, somehow, if Paulette doesn't think so—" he forgot all about the Valenka—"and that he took

Digitized by Google

those emeralds; left the girl powerless even to think so; and disappeared. I never saw him; don't even know what he looks like. But if ever I get a chance, I'll hand him over to the law as I'd hand a man I caught throwing a bomb at a child!"

"Shut up!" I said involuntarily. I knew it was silly, but I felt as if walls might have ears in a house that sheltered Paulette Brown, though I knew Marcia was in bed and asleep, and there was no one else to hear him. "You're never likely to see him here, anyway," since I meant to see him myself first, somehow; after which I trusted he was not likely to matter. And I thought of something to change the subject. "What were you going to say tonight about no one having seen poor old Thompson—when you cut yourself off?"

"Oh, that," Dudley replied almost carelessly. "It mayn't amount to anything, and I just shut up because I didn't want Macartney to take the wind out of my sails by saying so. It was only that if Thompson ever went to Caraquet it ought to be simple enough to find the boy who took his horse back to Billy Jones'; and there's apparently no such boy in Caraquet! What set me on Billy Jones was that first he said he didn't know the boy, and stammered and stuttered about him, and I don't believe there ever was any such boy! He's never been heard of since, anyway, any more than if he'd gone into the ground. And what I want to know is why—if it's all straight about Thompson and Billy Jones?"

I was silent. I remembered, I don't know why, the half-dead boy I had carried home to Skunk's Misery. There was no earthly cause to connect him with the return of Thompson's horse to the Halfway, but somehow my mind did connect him with it, obstinately. I had never really discovered how he had come to be hurt with a falling tree, and without reason some kind of animal instinct told me the two things belonged, and that they were queer. But before I could say so, Dudley burst out into unexpected speech, his little pig's-eyes as fierce as a tiger's:

"Look here, Stretton! I'm going to find out who drowned Thompson, Billy Jones or any one else, and who took Van Ruyne's emeralds—and hand them both over to the law if I die for it. And when I say that, you know I mean it!"

I did. But once more I made no answer, for I thought I heard Marcia in the passage.

I am quick on my feet, and I was outside the door before I finished thinking it. But it was not Marcia outside—it was only Macartney. Yet I checked up and stared at him, for it was a Macartney I had never seen.

He was close to the living-room door, just as if he had been listening to Dudley, and his face was the face of a devil. I never want to see set eyes like his again. But all the effect they had on me then was to make me curiously angry, and I swore at him:

"What the devil's the matter with you, Macartney? What do you want?"

"My keys," he replied roughly, "I left them somewhere round this passage, and I had to come back for them; I couldn't get into my office. As for what's the matter—" he lowered his voice and motioned me some feet away, out of the light from the living-room door—"I heard all Wilbraham said just now, and by gad, the man's crazy! We've got to get him off all that rot about Billy Jones, or any one else, murdering Thompson; it's stark madness. Both of us know Billy wouldn't murder a cat!

"And there's another thing, too! I heard all Wilbraham said about that Valenka girl's cousin, and I wish you'd tell him to go slow on it. I was in too much of a rage or I'd have gone in and told him myself. Dick Hutton was a friend of mine. No matter how much he was in love with a girl who'd got sick of him for Van Ruyne, he wasn't the kind to sneak round the Houstons' house as a servant. I won't let any one say that with impunity. It's no use my telling Wilbraham so in the state he's in tonight, but you might gently hint it when you've a chance. I wish to heaven he'd give up drink and drugs, and being an amateur detective!" He shrugged his shoulders with a complete return to his ordinary manner. "I'm sorry I startled you just now, but I was too angry to say I was here. Oh, there are my keys!" he stooped, picked them up off the floor and went out with a careless good night.

"Was that Macartney?" Dudley inquired as I went back to him. "I thought he'd gone!"

"Forgot the office key and came back for it." I felt no call to enter on Macartney's embassy about Hutton. "Going to bed?"

Dudley gulped down a horn of whisky that would have settled any two men in the

Digitized by Google

bunkhouse, nodded, and shut the door behind him. I put out the lamp and sat on in the living-room alone, how long I don't know.

I had nothing pleasant to think of either. It was no use my trying to imagine Tatiana Paulina Valenka was not going to marry Dudley, whatever I had hoped about Paulette Brown. As far as any chance of her loving me was concerned, I had lost my dream-girl forever. She was none of my business any more, except that—"By gad! She is my business," I thought in a sudden bitter fury, "as far as Hutton and our gold! If I'm right, and he's hiding round here, I'll put a stopper on any more hold-ups. And I'll make good and sure she never goes out to meet him again, too."

As I swore it I turned away from the dead fire and the dark room that looked as if we'd all deserted it hours ago, and went Indian-silent into the hallway. And my heart contracted in a hard lump.

The passage was light as day, with the moon full on the window at the end of it. And with her back to me, wrapped in a shawl, stood my dream-girl, undoing the front door as noiselessly as I had come into the passage.

I let her do it. The hallway Marcia's bedroom door opened on, let alone Dudley's, was no place for Paulette Brown and me to talk. But I was just three feet behind her as she slid round the corner of the shack toward the bush that lay dark against the cold Winter moon. And I rustled with my feet on purpose, so that she turned and saw me, with the moon full on my face.

"You shan't do it," I said; I did not know I had made a stride to her till I felt her arm under my hand. "You shan't go!"

My dream-girl, who had two names, and belonged to Dudley anyhow, said nothing at all. She and I, who had really nothing to do with one another, if I would have laid my soul under her little feet, stood still in the cold moonlight, looking inimically into each other's eyes.

XI

MACARTNEY HEARS A NOISE: AND I FIND FOUR DEAD MEN

WE MUST have stood silent for a good three minutes. I think I was furious because Paulette did not speak to me. I said:

"You're not to go—you're never to go and meet Hutton again as long as you live!" And for the first time I saw my dream-girl flinch from me.

"What?" she gasped, so low I could hardly hear. "You know that? What am I going to do? My God! What am I going to do?"

"You're coming back into the house with me!"

We were on the blind side of the shack for Marcia and Dudley, but we were in plain view from Charliet's window, and I was not going to have even a cook look out and see Paulette talking to a man in the middle of the night. My own voice felt none too steady. I had never seen her anything but valiant before, and I had a lump in my throat. But I spoke roughly enough.

"I didn't know the whole of things till tonight. But now I do, you've got to trust me. Can't you see I mean to help you and Dudley, all I can?" If it were tough to have to add Dudley, I did it. But I felt her give an odd, quick shiver.

"Dudley?" she repeated almost scornfully. "Nobody can help Dudley but me—and this is my only way! Mr. Stretton, I promise you I'll never worry you again, but for God's sake let me meet Dick Hutton tonight!"

"Not blindly," said I brutally. "If you choose to tell me why—but we can't talk here! If you'll come into the house and trust me about what you want to do I may let you go just this once more, if I think it's the right way!"

"I've only half an hour before it's too late—for any way!" But she turned under the hand I had never lifted from her arm.

I led her noiselessly into the office. I was afraid of the living-room; Marcia might come back to it for a book or something. But no one but Dudley ever went near the office, and he was safely dead to the world, judging from the horn of whisky he had gone to bed on.

The place was freezing, for the inside sash was up, leaving only the double window between us and the night. And it was black-dark, too, with the moon on the other side of the house. But there were more things than love it was easier to talk about in the dark, to a dream-girl you would give your soul to call your own, and know you never will. And I began bluntly:

Digitized by Google

"You've never had any reason to distrust me. I've helped you——"

"Three times," sharply. "I know! I've been—grateful."

It was four, counting tonight, when I had warned her to hide her signature from Macartney; but I was not picking at trifles. I said:

"Well, I've trusted you, too! I knew the first night I came back here that you were meeting some man secretly, in the dark. But it was none of my business, and I held my tongue about it. Then, and when you met him again—when it was my business."

"Again?" I heard the little start she gave, if I could not see it.

"The night before you and I took the gold out," I answered practically, "when I told you your hair was untidy. I suppose you only thought I knew you had been out-of-doors, but I heard the man you met leave you, and heard you say to yourself that you'd have to get hold of the gold. I didn't know whether you were honest or not then, nor when I gave you back your little seal; not even when you started for Billy Jones's with me. I knew by the time I got there, if I was fool enough to believe it was Collins you were fighting instead of helping. But any fool must see now that Hutton was the only man likely to have followed you out here! I suppose he told you some lie about giving you up to the police for Van Ruyne's necklace, unless you made it worth while with Dudley's gold?"

Her assent made me angry clear through.

"My soul, girl!" I burst out. "You balked him about that, even when you knew he'd put that wolf-dope in my wagon, and you were risking your life. You put a bullet in him in the swamp—I can't see why you should be worrying to conciliate him by meeting him tonight!"

But she caught me up almost stupidly. "Put a bullet in him! I didn't—you must know I didn't!"

"There was blood in the swamp and on the road!"

I felt her staring at me in the dark.

"It wasn't Dick's," she said almost inaudibly. "It must have been some one else's. And—he doesn't know it was I shot some one that night!"

"It might do him good if he did!" I felt like shaking her, if I had not wanted to take her in my arms more. "Can't you see you've no reason to worry about Hutton? If Dudley told the truth tonight, and he stole those emeralds and put it off on you, it's you who have the whip hand of him!"

"But he didn't!" Paulette exclaimed wildly. "He wasn't near the Houstons' house! It's mad of Dudley to think so. I know he believes it, but—oh, it's mad all the same! And even if Dick did take those emeralds—though I can't see how it was possible—it wouldn't clear me! It would only mean he was able to drag me into it, somehow."

"But you never touched the necklace!" for I knew that.

"No," simply. "But I'm afraid of Dick all the more. If he did take it, to get me into his power——"

She caught my arm with her slim hands I always knew were so strong.

"Can't you see he's got me?" she said through her teeth. "And that next thing he'll get the La Chance gold? If you don't let me meet him tonight, I'll be helpless. I—oh, can't you see I'll be like a rat in a trap—not able to do anything? I can make him go, if I meet him! Otherwise—" the passion in her voice kept it down to a whisper—"it's not that I'm afraid he can make it look as if I stole from Dudley as well as from Van Ruyne. I'm afraid for Dudley!"

The two last words gave me a jar. I would have given most of the world to ask if she loved Dudley, but I didn't dare. I supposed a girl could love a man with a face like an egg, if she owed him enough. But whether she cared for him or not——

"By gad, you've got to tell Dudley that Hutton's here," I said roughly, because I was sick with the knowledge that anyhow she did not love me.

"Tell him?" she gasped, through the dark that was like a curtain between us. "I've told him twenty times—all I dared. And he won't listen to a word I say. Ask him. He'll tell you that's true."

I had no doubt it was. Even on business Dudley's brain ran on lines of its own; you might tell him a thing till you were black in the face, and he never believed it. Lately between drugs and drink, he was past assimilating any impersonal ideas at all. Macartney was so worried about him that he told off Baker, one of our new men, to go wherever Dudley went. I had no use for the man. He was a black-and-white-looking devil, and slim as they make them, in my opinion, though Dudley took to him as if

Digitized by Google

he were a long-lost brother luckily, though how luckily I couldn't know. But I wasn't thinking about Baker that night.

"We can't worry over Dudley," I said shortly. "He'll have to take care of himself. But you won't be helpless with Hutton, if I meet him tonight—in your place!"

"You? I couldn't bear you to be in it!" so sharply that I winced.

"It won't hurt you to take that much from me!" I went on baldly. "I've got to be in it! I'm not concerned with post-mortems and your past. All I know, personally, is that Hutton's hiding somewhere round this mine to hold up our gold shipments, and get even with Dudley. And if you'll tell me where to meet him tonight I can stop both and be saved the trouble of looking for him from here to Caraquet, let alone getting you some peace of mind instead of the hell you're living in."

"Oh, my God!" said Paulette exactly as if she were in church. "I can't take peace of mind like blood-money; I can't tell you where to find Dick, if you don't know now." And I should have known why if I had had any sense, but I had none. "It's no use, Mr. Stretton, I must go to Dick, alone. I—" but suddenly she blazed out at me: "I won't let you see him! And I'm going to him—now. Take your hand off me!"

I tightened it.

"You'll stay here! Please! And you can't go on preventing me from meeting Hutton, either. What about the first time I take any gold out over the Caraquet road and he and his gang try a hold-up on me?"

I said "gang" without thinking, for I was naturally dead sure he had one. But I was not prepared to have the cork come straight out of the bottle. Paulette clutched me till I bit my lip to keep steady.

"His gang's what I'm afraid of—for Dudley," she gasped, which certainly steadied me like a bucket of ice. "Look here, when first I met Dick he told me things, to frighten me—that he'd eighteen or twenty men laid up between here and Caraquet—enough to raid us here, even, if he chose. It was because I knew they were waiting somewhere on the road that night that I drove to Billy Jones's with you.

"It was one of them I shot when we tore through the swamp. But something went wrong with them—either they'd no guns or they didn't want to give themselves away by shooting when they saw we were ready—I don't know. But anyhow, something went wrong. And Dick was black angry. He—the last time I spoke to him he wouldn't even tell me what he'd done with his gang; just said he had them somewhere safe, in the last place you or Dudley would ever look for them.

"Oh, you needn't hold me any more, I've given in; I'm not going to meet Dick tonight. But I had to tell you about his gang if I can't about him. And listen, Mr. Stretton, I've tried every possible way to get it out of him, but Dick won't even answer when I taunt him for a coward who has to be backed up. I know he has men somewhere, but he won't tell me where they are, nor who they are—now. I believe—" but her voice changed sharply—"those two boys, Dunn and Collins! You don't think Dudley can be right and they are still alive, and have joined Dick's gang?"

"They're dead!" I was about sick of Dunn and Collins, and anyhow, I was wondering where the devil Hutton's gang could have gone after their fiasco in the swamp. "They may have meant to join Hutton. But I found what the wolves left, and that was dead, right enough."

"I don't believe they're dead," said Paulette quietly.

I shrugged my shoulders. But I never even asked her why. For suddenly, with that flat sort of knowledge you get when you realize you should have put two and two together long ago, I knew where Hutton's gang was now, and always had been. "Skunk's Misery," I thought dumbfounded. "By gad! Skunk's Misery!"

For the thing I should have added to the Skunk's Misery wolf-dope was my dream of men talking and playing cards under the very floor where I slept in the new house the Frenchwoman's son had built and gone away from—because it had been no dream at all. I had really heard real men under the bare lean-to where I lay half-asleep. And knowing the burrows and runways under the Skunk's Misery houses, I knew where—and that was just in some hidden den under the rocks the new house had been built on—that house left, ostentatiously, with the door open, for all the world to see.

I was blazing, as you always are blazing when you have been a fool. But I could start for Skunk's Misery the first thing in the morning, and start alone, with my mouth shut. None of our four old men

Digitized by Google

could be spared from the mill, and I had no use for any of Macartney's new ones; nor Macartney either, for he was no good in the bush.

As for Dudley, nerves and a loose tongue would do him less harm at home. Besides, any ticklish job is a one-man job, and I was best alone. Once I got hold of Hutton there would be no trouble with his followers.

But I had no intention of mentioning Skunk's Misery to the girl beside me; she was as capable of following me there as of fighting wolves for me, and with no more reason.

"It's late, and neither you nor I are going to meet Hutton tonight," I said rather cheerlessly. "You'd better go to bed."

"I want to say something first," slowly, as if she had been thinking. "What Macartney said tonight—that I was engaged to Dick Hutton when Mr. Van Ruyne said I took those emeralds—wasn't true! I never was engaged to Dick. I was sorry for him once, because I knew he did—care for me. But I always hated him. I can't tell you how I hated him! I didn't think I could ever love any man till—just lately."

It made me sick to know she meant Dudley. I would have blurted out that shrinking from the mere touch of his hand was a queer way to show it; only I was afraid to speak at all, for fear I begged her for God's sake not to speak of love and Dudley to me! And suddenly something banged even that out of my head.

"Listen." I heard my own whisper. "Somebody's awake—walking round!"

It was only the faintest noise, more like a rustle than a footstep, but it sounded like Gabriel's trumpet to a man alone in the middle of the night with a girl he had no shadow of right to. If it was Marcia—but I knew that second it was not Marcia, nor even Dudley; though I would rather have had his just fury than Marcia's evil thoughts and tongue.

"By gad, it's outside!" I breathed. "Look out!"

But suddenly I changed my mind on it. There was only one person who could be outside, and that was Hutton, sick of waiting for Paulette, and come to look for her. I had no desire for her to see how I met him instead, and my hands found her shoulders in the dark.

"Get back in the corner—and don't stir!"

As she moved under my hands the faint sweet scent of her hair made me catch my breath with a sort of fierce elation. The gold and silk of it were not for me, I knew well enough, but at least I could keep Hutton's hands off it. I slipped to the side of the window and stared out into the dark shadow of the house that lay black and square in the white moonlight. On the edge of it was a man, and the silly elation left my heart like the gas leaves a toy balloon when you stick a pin in it. It was not Hutton outside. It was, for the second time that night, only Macartney.

It stood and stared at him like a fool. It was a good half minute before I even wondered what had brought Macartney out of his bed in the assay office. I watched him stupidly, and he moved toward my window, hesitated, and then turned to the house door.

My heart gave a jump Hutton never could have brought there. Macartney in the house with a light, coming into the office for something, for all I knew, and finding Paulette and me, would merely be a living telephone to Marcia! I tapped at the office window.

Macartney had good ears, I praised the Lord. He turned, not startled, but looking round him searchingly, and I stuck my head out of the hinged pane of the double window, thanking the Lord again that I had not to shove up a squeaking inside sash.

"What's brought you back again?" I kept my voice down, remembering Marcia. "Anything wrong?"

"What?" said Macartney rather sharply. He came close and stared at me. "Oh, it's you, Stretton! I thought it was Wilbraham, and he wouldn't be any good. It was you I wanted. I've got a feeling that there's somebody hanging round after our gold!"

I hoped to Heaven he had not seen Hutton waiting for an appointment a girl was not going to keep, and I half lied.

"I haven't seen any one. D'ye mean you thought you did?"

Macartney nodded.

"Couldn't swear to it, but I think so; and I've too much gold in my safe to go to bed; I cleaned up this afternoon. I was certain I saw a strange man slip behind the bunkhouse when I went down, and I've been hunting him ever since. I thought I saw him again just now. But if I did, he's gone."

Digitized by Google

"I'll come out!"

But Macartney shook his head sententiously.

"I'm enough! I've guns for the four mill men who sleep in the shack off the assay office, and you've a whack of gold in the room you're standing in. Though I don't believe there's any real need for either of us to worry; if there was any one round I've scared him. I only thought I'd better come in and warn you I'd seen some one. 'Night."

And he was gone. I had a sudden idea that he might be a better man in the woods than I had thought he was, for he slid out of the house-shadow into the bush without ever showing up in the moonlight. And as I thought it I felt Paulette clutch me, shivering from head to foot. It shocked me somehow. I put my arm straight round her, like you do round a child, and spoke deliberately.

"Steady, sweet, steady! It's all right. Hutton's gone by now. Macartney and I'll take care of you."

"Oh, my heavens!" said Paulette. It sounded half as if she were sick with despair and half as if I was hopelessly stupid. "Take care of me—you can't take care of me! You should have let me go. It's too late now."

She pushed my arm from her as if she hated me, and was gone before I could speak, down the passage to her own room.

I shut the office window with the inside sash down this time, and took a scout round outside. But Macartney was right; if any one had been waiting about he was gone. I could not find hide nor hoof of him anyhow, and the moon went down, and I went in and went to bed.

In two minutes I must have been asleep like a log—and the first way I knew it was that I found myself out of bed, dragging my clothes on, and grabbing up my gun.

Whatever the row was it was in the assay office. I heard Macartney yell my name through a volley of shots; and knew I had stopped Paulette meeting Hutton, and Hutton had dropped on Macartney and the assay office gold.

I shook at Dudley till he sat up, sober as I never could have been in his shoes, saw him light out in his pajamas to keep guard in his own office that Paulette and I had only just left, and legged it for Macartney.

I didn't see a soul on the way except the men who were piling out of the bunkhouse at the sound of a row, as I had piled out of bed, and I thought Macartney had raised a false alarm; but inside his office door I knew better.

The four mill men who slept in the shack just off it were all on the office floor, dead or next door to it. Their guns were on the floor, too, and Macartney stood towering over the mess.

"Get those staring bunkhouse fools out of here," he said blackly, as the men crowded in after me. "I haven't lost any gold, only somebody tried to raid me. Why the devil didn't you come and cut them off when I yelled for you? They—they got away!"

And suddenly, before I even saw he was swaying, he keeled over on the floor.

XII

THOMPSON'S CARDS: AND SKUNK'S MISERY

FOR that second I thought Macartney was dead. But as I jumped to him I saw he had only fainted, and that nothing ailed him but a bullet that had glanced off his upper arm and left more of a gouge than a wound. Why it made him faint I couldn't see, but it had.

I left him where he had dropped and turned to the four men he had been standing over. But they were past helping. They were decent men, too, for they were the last of our own lot, and it smote me like a hammer that they might have been alive still if I had not interfered with Paulette that night and kept her from meeting Hutton.

I knew, as I knew there was a roof over my head, that it was he who had fallen on Macartney, and I would have chased straight after him if common sense had not told me he would be lying up in the bush for just that, and all I should get for my pains would be a bullet out of the dark that would end all chance of my ever catching Hutton personally.

I took stock of things where I stood, instead. Whether he had a gang or not, I knew he had been alone in the thing tonight, and he had done a capable job. Our four men had been surprised, for they were all shot in the back, as if they had been caught coming in the office door.

Whether Macartney had been surprised or not, I could not tell. The revolver he

Digitized by Google

had dropped as he fainted lay beside him empty, and there were slivers out of the door-post behind the dead men. None of them seemed to have been much help to him. Three had not fired a shot; the fourth had just one cartridge missing from his revolver, where he lay with his face to the door; and I saw it accounted for by a tearing slash in a blue-print stuck on the wall to the left of the doorway.

I turned to the inside wall to see where the bullet that had glanced off Macartney had landed, and as I swung round he sat up.

"You may well look—it was one of our own men got me," he said thickly, and his curse turned my stomach; I never knew any good come of cursing the dead.

I told him to shut up and get out with how the thing had happened. And he grinned with sheer rage.

"It was plain —— foolery! I told you I believed I'd seen some one spying round the mine, and after I'd left you I didn't feel so sure that I'd cleared him out. I woke those fools up—" his glance at the dead matched his curse at them—"and said if they heard any one prowling round my door they were to lie low in their own shack, let him get in at me here, and then bundle out and cut him off from behind! And what they did was to lose their heads. They heard some one or they didn't—I don't know. But the crazy fools piled out of their shack and ran in to me; and a man behind them—behind them, mind you—came on their heels and plugged every son of them before they were more than inside my door! It was then I yelled for you."

"D'ye mean you saw him—when he shot them?"

"I didn't see what he looked like," scornfully, "with four yelling, tumbling men between him and me. But I guess he was the man I'd been looking for. I fired and missed him, and when I lit for him over the men he'd killed, he was gone. I emptied my gun into the dark on chance and yelled some more for you, and it was then I got it myself. As I turned round in the doorway, Sullivan—" he pointed to the only man whose gun had been fired—"that I thought was dead, sat up and let me have it in the arm." He pointed to the ripped blue-print. "You see what I'd have got if it had caught me straight! And that's all there was to it."

"D'ye mean—" I bit back Hutton's name; I had no time to hatch up a lie about him, and I was not going to drag in Paulette—"that whoever was there never even fired at you?"

"How do I know who he fired at? I couldn't see inside of his head! I know he hit those chumps who could have got him if they had obeyed orders—let alone that if they'd stayed out I'd have got him clean myself when he came in. As it was, he cleared out before I could do it," said Macartney blackly, but the excitement had gone from his voice. "Call a couple of the bunkhouse men to carry these four back to their shack and clean up this mess, will you? And come into my room while I tie up this cut. It's no good going after whoever was here now."

I knew that; also that I could get after him better single-handed at Skunk's Misery, where he would not expect me, or I would have been gone already. But I didn't air that to Macartney as I followed him into the partitioned-off corner he called his room.

He had the last two clean-ups in his safe there, and he nodded to it as he hauled off his shirt for me to bind up his arm.

"With what's there, and what you and Wilbraham have in his office, we've too much 'round to be healthy," he observed succinctly, "and I guess some one's got wind of it. I don't know that it'll be any healthier for you to try running it out to Caraquet, and get held up on the road! But I suppose it's got to go."

I nodded. I knew it was hand to mouth with Dudley. He had no cash to call on but the mine output, and immediate payments to make on the very machinery we were using. But I was not excited about being held up on the Caraquet road, after I'd once been to Skunk's Misery. I was not red-hot about hurrying there, either; I wanted to give Hutton time to get back to his lair and feel comfortable about pursuit for his abortive raid.

"I expect we'll worry along," I returned carelessly. "Gimme that clean rag for your arm."

Macartney cast down a handkerchief he had in his hand.

"This fool thing's too short! Open that trunk, will you? There's a roll of bandage and stuff, right on top."

There was. But there was something else

Digitized by Google

right on top, too. I stared at a worn leather case that pretended to be a prayer-book with an imitation gold clasp and tarnished gilt edges: a case I had seen too often to make any mistake about.

"By gad!" said I blankly. "Why, you've got old Thompson's cards!"

Macartney was poking at his wounded arm, and he winced.

"Hurry up, will you? I can't stop this confounded blood. Of course I've got Thompson's cards! I can't help it if you think I'm an ass. I liked the old man, and I didn't fancy the Billy Joneses playing cribbage with about the only thing in the world he'd cared for! I took the cards—the day we buried him."

"I expect you needn't have worried about Billy," I commented absently. "He was going to give those cards to me, only he and I couldn't find them."

"Come on, will you?" snapped Macartney. He was set-eyed as usual, but I guessed he was ashamed to have had me find him out in a sentimental weakness. "I'd have told you I had them if I'd known you cared. You can take the things now, if you want them."

It was not till that minute that I remembered Macartney could not know why I wanted them, nor anything about the sort of codicil I'd torn off the envelope of Thompson's letter to Dudley; for there had been nothing about cards in what he'd read in it, nor in the letter itself. But as the remembrance of both things shot up in me I didn't confide them to Macartney, any more than I had to Dudley himself.

I had a queer sort of feeling that if Thompson's penciled scrawl had meant anything more than the wanderings of a distressed mind, I'd better get hold of it first. I said: "All right," and pocketed Thompson's cards. Then I did up Macartney's arm, and the two of us went up the road to Dudley. He and his drynurse, Baker, who'd promptly arrived from the bunkhouse, stumped straight back with Macartney to fuss over the men who'd been killed.

I was making for my own room, to see if Thompson's resurrected cards would shed any light on his crazy scrawls, when I heard a rustling noise in the living-room. Somebody was in there, raking up the fire.

Charliet had gone after Macartney, with Dudley and Baker. I guessed Paulette had got up, and was trying to start the fire, for she was always trying to keep things comfortable, if I haven't mentioned it, even for me. I once caught her darning my rags of socks and crying over them, the Lord knows why.

I went in to stop her, and it was I stopped dead in the doorway. It was not Paulette inside; it was Marcia! Marcia in a velvet dressing-gown, poking the ashes all over the hearth. I could have sworn I'd seen Paulette burn the letter she had signed by Tatiana Paulina Valenka's name, but all the same the look of Marcia's back turned me sick. And her face turned me sicker as she flung round on me, with her fingers all ashes, and Paulette's letter in her hand.

I kept back a curse at the fool that was me. I might have seen it was not a tightly folded wad of stiff paper I had watched burn up, but just the light, torn scraps Paulette had thrown in with it. What was more, I had been alone with the thing under my very nose in the light ashes into which it must have sunk, and never had the sense to burrow for it!

It was too late even to snatch for it. Marcia had read it. She held it up to me now, and Tatiana Paulina Valenka, black on the yellow of the scorched paper, hit me on the eyes.

"Who was right, Nicky Stretton?" she demanded triumphantly. "I told you I'd seen Paulette Brown before! Only I never thought of the Houston business. I could kill Dudley. How dare he bring me out here with a thief? I won't have her here one other day."

"What thief?" I snapped. "I don't know what you mean. What in the devil set you poking in the ashes? What are you up for?"

"Only a Paulette Brown could stay asleep, with Dudley yelling at you and Macartney," scornfully. "But if you want to know what I was poking in the ashes for, I had no matches and my fire was out, so I came in here for a log to light it up. And I found this!"

"Well, burn it!" said I furiously.

But she had begun to read it out, and I would have been a fool to stop her, for what Marcia knew I had to know. But it knocked me silly. The something Paulette had "wanted to make clear," was just a letter to Hutton. And the Lord knows it made me more set on getting to Skunk's Misery than ever, before Hutton could know that Tatiana

Digitized by Google

Paulina Valenka had given in. Because she had. She was not only going to meet him —she was going away with him, Marcia's hard voice read out baldly—if only he would give up the plan in his head. But it was the last sentence that bit into me:

"Oh, Dick, have some mercy! I know you hate me now, but have some mercy. Don't do what I'm afraid of. I'll give you all you want—myself—everything—if only you'll let that be. Go away, as I begged you, and I'll leave Dudley for you—and go too."

And it was signed, as I knew Paulette Brown had not meant to sign anything, "Tatiana Paulina Valenka."

I never even wondered how she had meant to get it to Hutton, if she had not supposed she burned it. Every drop of my blood boiled in me that she should never pay Hutton's price; with her lips against his that she hated, and his cheek on her soft hair I had never touched; all the gold Dudley Wilbraham could ever mine was not worth that. But I kept a cold eye on Marcia.

"A half-burnt letter—that wasn't going to be sent—isn't anything but girl's nonsense," I swore contemptuously.

"Isn't it? We'll see—when Dudley reads it!" Marcia looked like a devil hunched up in her dressing-gown, with her gums showing as she grinned. "I told you she never meant to marry him. Now we'll see if he marries her, when she writes letters like this!"

"I won't let you show it to Dudley!"

"You are like everybody—cracked about a Paulette Brown!" Marcia retorted.

And if I had only known what that "everybody" was going to mean I think I could have managed her, even then, by coming out with it. But I couldn't know, and I did the best I could.

"Marcia Wilbraham, if you dare to show that thing to Dudley, or so much as speak of it, I'll pay you out—so help me," I said; and if it was in a voice no decent woman knows a man can use, I meant it to be.

It scared Marcia, anyhow, though Heaven knows I didn't know how I could ever pay her out, no matter what she did. She let go of the letter, which she had to, for I had her by the wrist. I would have burnt it up, only I had no match. Marcia leaned forward suddenly, electrically, and tapped the "Oh, Dick," in the last sentence, that was the only name in the letter.

"Well, I'm ——!" said she blankly. "Why, the thing's to you! "D'ye mean you're going to run away with that—that girl?"

"No," said I furiously, and then saw I was an ass. "I mean, not now——"

"Since I know about you," Marcia cut me off sweetly.

But she stared at me calculatingly.

"H-m," said she. "I beg your pardon for mistaking your N. for a big, big D., Nicky darling, but you see I never heard anyone call you plain, short Nick. I don't see exactly why she had to write, with you in the house, either, but you needn't be nervous. I'm not going to use my cinch on you—not now, anyway! I've changed my mind about telling Dudley. It won't do me any harm to keep something up my sleeve against you, if ever I want to do anything you don't admire. It wasn't the least bit of use for you to snatch that letter; I learned it off by heart before you came in on me. I can always threaten Dudley now that I'll tell who Paulette Brown really is, if he tries to bully me about any one I have a fancy for!"

Somehow I knew she was thinking of Macartney. I didn't believe Dudley would have cared if she'd married him ten times over. But he might have had some unreasonable objection to Macartney, for all I knew.

"I don't care one straw about your knowing I was going to take Paulette Brown out of this. But if you don't hold your tongue on it I'll know it, so you mind that," I observed with some heat.

But I was easier. She could not talk that night anyhow, and she was welcome to come out with her crazy lie about Paulette and me, once Hutton was dead, because he and a snake would be all one to me, once I got my hand on him. After that I had no qualms about being able to make Dudley see the truth about that letter, and that it had been written to save his gold—and his life, likely enough.

I let it go at Marcia's believing the name in the letter was mine, and that Paulette had been going off with me. All I wished was that she had been. I went off to my room, and left Marcia sitting over the dead fire, not so triumphant as she'd meant to be, for all the good face she put on it.

Paulette's letter had pretty well knocked out all the interest I had in old Thompson's

Digitized by Google

cards, but I got out the torn scrap of paper I'd put away. There was nothing on it but what I'd read before: "For God's sake search my cards—my cards!" And it looked crazier than ever with the things in my hand.

The cards had been water-soaked, and were bumpy and blistery where Billy Jones had dried them, even though they were flattened out again by the pressure of their tight case; but there was nothing to them, except that they were old Thompson's beyond a doubt. If I had thought there might be writing on them there was not so much as the scratch of a pencil.

There seemed to be a card missing. I thought it was the deuce of hearts; but I was too sick about Marcia's discovery about Paulette to go over the things and make sure. I shoved them in my coat pocket beside what was there already, just as Dudley came into the room.

He had enough to worry him, without knowing Marcia had found out about Paulette. He sat on my bed, biting his nails, and said what Macartney had said—that we had too much gold at La Chance to run the risk of losing it by a better organized raid on it; and what I had known for myself—that the mine output represented his only ready money for notes that were past renewing, and that it had to go out to Caraquet.

When I asked why not, he bit his nails some more and said he was afraid of a hold-up. What he wanted me to do was to ride over to the Halfway and scout round from there to clear the Caraquet road, before I started out from La Chance with an ounce of gold.

The idea suited me well enough. It would cover my expedition to Skunk's Misery. But I did not mention that, nor Hutton, to Dudley; and never guessed I was a criminal fool. I did not mean to waste any time in scouting round the road, either, when I knew just where my man would be sitting, with the half-dozen wastrels he had probably scraped up.

But first, I wanted five minutes, even two minutes, with Paulette, to warn her of what Marcia knew. So I said that afternoon would be time enough to start.

But Dudley would not hear of it, and blazed out till I had to give up all idea of warning Paulette and get out. And the last person I saw as I rode away from La Chance was Macartney, though I might not have remembered it if I had not turned my head after I passed, and caught the same grin on his face as he had worn the night his own man shot him. I rode back and asked what the devil he was grinning at.

"Grinning because I'm angry," Macartney retorted with his usual set stare. "I'd sooner go with you than stay here, burying men and talking to Wilbraham. I'm sick of La Chance, if you'd like to know. I came here to mine, not to play moving-pictures. But I guess I've got to stick, unless I can hurry up my job here. So long—but I don't expect you'll see anything of last night's man on the Caraquet road!"

Neither did I, nor of any one else. But I was not prepared to find the Halfway stable empty when I rode in there just on to dark.

The house was as deserted as the stable, though the fire was alive in the stove, and, taking both things together, I guessed Billy and his wife had run a four-horse team into Caraquet for a load. I had meant to borrow one of his horses to go on to Skunk's Misery, for this time I intended to ride there. But with no horse to borrow, there was nothing for it but to ride my own, and it was toward ten that night when I left him to wait for me in a spruce thicket, within half a mile of the porcupine burrows that Skunk's Misery called houses.

As I turned away, the cold bit a hundred times worse for the lack of snow in the woods, and the bare ground made the pat of my moccasins sound louder than I liked; but, on the other hand, I should leave no track back to my waiting horse if I had to clear out without getting Hutton. The thought made me grin, it was so darned unlikely.

Hutton would be asleep, judging from the look of things; for, as I got fairly into it, Skunk's Misery lay still as the dead. The winding tracks through it were deserted, silent, between and under great rocks and boulders; slippery in the open, with pine droppings from the trees that grew in and on the mess of huddled rocks. The wind rose a little, too, and soughed in the pine-branches, to die wailing among the stones.

It did not strike me as a cheerful wind for a man in Hutton's shoes, for it covered the light sound of my feet, past the hut of the boy I had nursed and through the maze of tracks his mother had shown me, to the new log lean-to the Frenchwoman's son had

Digitized by Google

built and never used. But, as I reached it, I was suddenly not so sure I had Hutton.

The lean-to looked all right. The door was open, just as I had left it, but as I crossed the threshold I knew I was too late and there was nobody inside, nor in the cave underneath it where men had been when I slept there, if I had been too big a fool to guess it. The place had that empty feeling of desertion, of late occupancy and a cold lair, that even a worse fool than I could not mistake now.

I shut the door on myself without sound, all the same; snapped my pocket lantern; and stared at just what I had known I was going to find.

There was nothing to the place but the bare lean-to walls, but there had been twenty men living there since I left it. The black mark of their fire was plain against the rock face, the log floor splintered by heavy boots with nails in them—which did not speak of the moccasined return of the Frenchwoman's son—and in the place where I had once made a bed of pine boughs and taken it away with me there lay a flurry of litter that spoke volumes; for among it was a corned-beef can that was no product of Skunk's Misery, where squirrels and rabbits meant meat—and a corked bottle of wolf-dope!

That stuff I laid gingerly aside, till I poked round in the rest of the mess, but there was not much else there besides kindling. I got up to leg it for the underground cave. Blazing that I had missed Hutton, and half hoping he might be there, I dropped flump on my knees again, dumfounded.

Underneath the displaced litter, stuck sideways in a crack of the log floor, was a shiny, dirty white playing-card. I pulled it out. And in the narrow white beam of my electric lantern I saw the missing two of hearts out of Thompson's cards.

I saw more, too, before I even wondered how one of Thompson's cards had ever got to Skunk's Misery. It was written on, closely, finely, and legibly, with indelible pencil; and as I read the short sentences, word by word, I knew Thompson had never got to Caraquet, never got anywhere but to the cave under the very lean-to I knelt in till he had been brought up from it, here, to be taken away and drowned in Lac Tremblant, as a decent man would not drown a dog. And I knew, at last, where Hutton and his gang were, and who Hutton was.

But I made no move to go underground to look for them. And the only word that came to my tongue was "Macartney!"

XIII

A DEAD MAN'S MESSENGER

FOR the written message on Thompson's lost card was plain. Macartney was Hutton! And Hutton's gang were just the new, rough men Macartney had dribbled in to the La Chance mine.

It was Macartney—our capable, hard-working superintendent—for whom Paulette had mistaken me in the dark that first night I came home to La Chance and the dream-girl who was no nearer me now than she was then; Macartney she had sealed the boxes of gold from, to prevent him substituting others and sending me off to Caraquet with worthless dummies; Macartney I had heard her say to herself she could not trust; Macartney who had put that wolf-dope, that there was no longer any doubt he had brought from Skunk's Misery, in my wagon; Macartney who had had that boulder stuck in the road to smash my pole, by the same men who were posted by the corduroy road through the swamp, to cut me off there if the wolves and the broken wagon failed; and Macartney who had been balked by a girl I had left at La Chance, to fight him alone now.

The thing seemed to jump at me from six places at once, now that I knew enough to see it was there at all. But what sickened me at my own utter blindness was not the gall of the man, but just the risk he had let Paulette run on the Caraquet road, and—old Thompson. For Thompson had never sent Macartney to La Chance, and Macartney had had him murdered in cold blood.

If my eyes jogged as I stared at the dead man's two of hearts, it was only half with fury. Old Thompson had been decent, harmless, happy with his unintelligent work and his sad solitaire, and he had been through seven hells before he wrote what I read now:

Wilbraham—Stretton—pray God one of you saw all I could put inside envelope of last letter Macartney forced me to write. I never sent him to La Chance. I never saw the man till he waylaid me between Halfway and Caraquet, and took me here. Do not know where it is; am prisoner underground. Wrote you two letters to save my miserable life;

Digitized by Google

know now I have not saved it. Your lives—gold—everything—in danger, too. For God's sake get Macartney before he gets you. No use to look for me. Tried to warn you inside envelope, but suppose was no use. Good-by. *Take care, take care!* There was a boy Macartney sent off with my horse; was kind; said he would come back. When he does, takes this to you—. He has not come. Been brought up into lean-to, am gagged, feel death near. Forgive treachery—life was dear—get Macar——

But the scrawl broke off in a long pencil line, where death had jerked Thompson's elbow and his card had fallen from his hand.

I sat on the floor and saw the thing. Macartney — hidden in Skunk's Misery, making plans to get openly and with decent excuse to La Chance—had fallen on Thompson and used him. And for Thompson, writing lying letters in Skunk's Misery, in fear of the death that had come to him in the end, there had been no rescue. His scribbled envelope, even if Dudley or I had understood it, had come too late.

The boy who took his horse to Billy, whoever he was, had never come back. Thompson had not even had time, in the end, to slip his written-over card into the cased pack I had found in his almost empty pockets before Macartney's men—for of course Macartney himself had never been near the place since he got his wolf-dope there and left it for good—had taken him off and made away with him.

Once his last letter was written and posted from Caraquet, to be reposted to Dudley from Montreal by some unknown hand, Macartney had no more use for Thompson; and a screen against betrayal on two sides, either from his own men, or that chance finding of Thompson's body that had actually happened; for Thompson's own letter would clear his murderer.

As for Thompson's envelope— But it made me sick to think of the poor old thing scrawling on the inside of his envelope, furiously, furtively, while the ink of his neat copper-plate dried on the outside, and Macartney likely stood by poring over the actual letter, wondering if there was any flaw in it that could show out and damn him.

And the desperate scrawl in the envelope had been no good, thanks to the fool tongue and brain of me, Nicky Stretton. It had done more to warn Macartney than either Dudley or me, since if Thompson had written in the reverse of the envelope, he was likely also to have written on anything that would take a pencil. It was no wonder Macartney had stood stunned over that envelope till Dudley and I believed him heartsick for his friend, for it must have been then he remembered Thompson's cards—that I guessed the old man had just sat and played with, day in and day out, when he was a prisoner and about to die. Thompson could have written on them. And Macartney must have feared it, or he would never have stolen them from Billy Jones.

I hoped grimly that he had been good and worried before he got his chance to do it, and set his mind at ease. And at ease it had been, for he had known nothing about the cards; he could only have taken them on chance, from sheer terror, and found them harmless. He had probably never even noticed one was missing. And whatever Thompson had not been wise about, he had been wise when he took out a deuce, and not one of the four aces the most casual eye must miss, or he would never have let me have them, contemptuously, as one lets a child play with a knife without a blade.

Only I was not so sure this particular knife had no blade—for Macartney.

He knew nothing of the desperate words on the bottom flap of that envelope that his own hasty grab had jerked off and left in my fist; nothing of the deuce of hearts that made its crazy inscription pitifully sane to me now; and nothing in particular about me, Nicky Stretton. But when I came to think of all I knew about Macartney, that was no remarkable consolation. For, except his never noticing that the bottom flap of Thompson's envelope was missing, and taking it for granted that it had been blank like the top one, he had made a fool of me all along the line.

I had stopped Paulette from going away with him the night before, after she thought she burned the note she had meant to slip into his hand, and all I had got by it was that he must have told her, outside in the passage when I thought he was sending a message to Marcia, that if she did not go with him then he would begin trouble that night for Dudley and La Chance.

And he had! It was Paulette he was waiting round for himself when he lied to me about a strange man. And he had gone straight down to the assay office, done his own alarm of a robber, and killed four men to give it artistic truth. It was no wonder that he said he was sick of playing in moving-pictures, nor grinned at me when I left

Digitized by Google

La Chance to search the Caraquet road for nobody else but him.

As for his gang: the bunkhouse men he had told me to order out of the assay office, those were just Macartney's own gang from Skunk's Misery, come over when they had silenced Thompson forever; at Macartney's elbow whenever he chose to murder the lot of us and commandeer the La Chance mine. I wished, irrelevantly, that Dunn and Collins had got to Macartney, instead of being killed on the way; they might have been chancy young devils about stealing gold, but they would never have stood for murdering old Thompson. It was no good thinking of that, though.

I stowed Thompson's deuce of hearts, that no boy had ever come for, in the case with those other pitiful cards he had told me to search, and got on my feet with only one thought in my head—to get back to La Chance and my dream-girl that Macartney was alone with, but for Dudley; Dudley whom he hated, who had threatened him for Paulette Valenka, for Thompson, till it was no wonder I had found him with the face of a devil where he lurked eavesdropping in the shack hall. And there something else hit me whack. Baker, Dudley's jackal, was one of Macartney's gang, told off, for all I knew, to put him out of the way.

I wheeled to get out of that —— lean-to quicker than I had got in. And, instead, I stood rooted to the floor. Below me, somewhere underground, somebody was moving.

NATURALLY, I knew it could not be Macartney, because he could not have got there, even if he had not had other fish to fry at home. But one of his gang might have been left at Skunk's Misery and could have the life choked out of him. There was no way underground direct from the lean-to, or I would have been caught the night I slept there and believed real voices were a dream.

I slid out the door, round the boulder that backed the place, and was afraid of my lantern. I went down on my hands and knees to feel for a track, and found one down a gully that ran in under a blind rock.

I crawled down it, all but flat, as I burrowed like a rabbit, with my back scraping against the living rock between me and the sky, and my head turned to the place where I knew the lean-to stood. I was under it, with no warning whatever, in a natural, man-high cellar I could stand up in, with half a dozen bolt-holes running off it; and I had no need to flash my lantern to see them.

There was a light in the place already, from a candle-end Macartney's men must have left behind. And beside it, not looking at me, not even hearing my step, because he was sobbing his heart out, lay the boy I had carried home from the Caraquet road.

"Thompson's boy, who took his horse to Billy—who never came back!" I said to myself.

God knows I touched him gently, but he screamed like a shot rabbit, till he saw my face.

"You?" said I. "What's the matter with you? Brace up; it's only me."

Brace up was just what he did not do. He sank back as if every muscle in him relaxed.

"*Bon Dieu!* I thought you was him come back," he gasped in his bastard French-Indian. "That man that half-killed me on the Caraquet road! But it wasn't him I was crying about. It was the other man that promised me two dollars!"

"To come back and take a letter—where you'd taken his horse?"

The boy, I did not even know his name, nodded, with a torrent of sullen *patois*. He had never come for his two dollars, and now the man was gone and he would never get it. But it was not his fault. The first man, the one who had sent him to the Halfway with the horse, had caught him crawling back for the letter, told him the man who was going to pay him had gone away long ago, and taken him out to chop firewood and let a tree fall on him.

Why Macartney had not made sure he was dead, I did not see. I think the thing that stabbed me was that I had been within five hundred yards of Thompson all the time I was nursing this very boy; that the knowledge of it had been within a hand's breadth of me, behind unconscious lips; that I had gone away ignorant, leaving Thompson robbed of the only help he could ever have had.

"Why didn't you tell me all this the night I came over to your mother's?" I groaned.

The boy said shortly that his mother would have gone straight off and told I'd

Digitized by Google

been there, if he had come out with the truth. It was all lies she had told me about the Frenchwoman's son. He had never been near the place. It was the man who had half killed him who had built the lean-to, and his mother had said she would finish the business if ever he opened his mouth about it, or let out the truth about the same man sending him to the Halfway with a horse, or the smelling stuff she had helped him make.

"You're sure she didn't go and tell that man about me, anyway?" I remembered Macartney's grin.

But the boy shook his head.

"She didn't worry; she said you were too big a fool to matter!"

After which wholesome truth he announced listlessly that he was done with his mother. She had turned him out of her house now, anyway. She said he was no good to her, since all he could do was to crawl; he could not even trap enough rabbits to live on, and she had another man living in the house who would do it for her. So he had come here to find the man who had promised him two dollars—that solitary bill that had been the only thing in Thompson's pockets—and when he found him gone and the place empty he had stayed there to hide, and because he had nowhere else to go.

I thought of his mother's haggard, handsome face and hard mouth. Macartney had certainly found a good ally when he was laid up in Skunk's Misery waiting for his chance to fall on Paulette.

But all that did not matter now. What did matter was that I had found the missing link between Thompson's cards and Macartney, in the boy who had taken his horse back to the Halfway. I had no mind to produce him now, though; for there were other things to be looked to than showing up Thompson's murder. And the boy was best where he was, for one glance at him had told me he could not walk half a mile.

"Are you safe from your mother here, and can you get food for yourself?" I demanded abruptly, and the boy nodded the head I knew would never be other than a cripple's. "Well, you stay here," because if ever I needed the poor devil for a witness against Macartney he would be no good lying dead, somewhere in the bush, "and I'll come back and pay you ten times two dollars for just waiting here till I come. But you'll have to hide if that man comes back, who sent you out with the horse!"

Because Macartney would kill him in good earnest, if he came back and found him with a living tongue in his head.

"Don't you trust any one but me—or some one who comes and gives you twenty dollars," I added emphatically, just because that was the only absolutely unlikely event I could think of. "And even then, you stay here till you see me! Understand?"

He said he did; it was easy enough to creep out after dark and rob rabbit-traps; he was doing it now. And from the greed a fortune of twenty dollars had lit in his wretched eyes, I knew he would go on doing it till I came back. Of what wildly unexpected use he was to be to me in his waiting, heaven knows I had no thought.

I crept out of his burrow as I had crept in, got back to my half-frozen horse and rode hell for leather back to the Halfway. And just there was where I slumped.

My horse had to be fed and rested. He was dead-beat when I led him into the unlocked stable, and when I had seen to him I meant to rouse up Billy Jones and tell him all the ugly stuff I had unearthed, and seen, too, for the killing of four innocent men was hot in my mind.

But I did not, for the excellent reason that Billy was not back. His house was dark and his four horses still away from their vacant stalls.

I sat down on a heap of clean straw to wait for him, and I said I slumped. I went sound, dead asleep. If I was hunting for excuses I might say it was two in the morning, and I had been up most of the night before. But anyhow I did it. And I sat up, dazed, to see a lantern straight in front of my eyes, and one of Macartney's men from La Chance staring at me.

It struck me, even then, that it was not he who was surprised; and the sleep jerked out of me like wine out of a glass.

"What are you doing here—and where the devil's Billy?" I snapped without thinking.

I saw the man grin.

"Billy's fired," he replied carelessly. "Him and his wife got it in a note from Wilbraham, day before yesterday, when your teamsters stopped here on their way to Caraquet. They doubled up their teams and took Billy and his wife and all their stuff; and I guess they'd been fired too, for

Digitized by Google

they ain't come back. Mr. Macartney sent me over with the teamsters. Anything I can do for you?"

"Take that lantern out of my eyes and hustle me up some breakfast. I'm—sorry about Billy!"

I was not; I was startled, and worse. It had not been Dudley who had dismissed him, asinine as he had been about Billy and old Thompson, or he would have told me. It had been Macartney, getting rid of him and my teamsters under my very nose, and —as Macartney's parting grin recurred to me—if this man had any one with him, in Billy's vacant shack, they had been put there to get rid of me.

"Get me a bucket of water, and make coffee if you haven't done it," I said, yawning. "I'll be in as soon as I've fed my horse."

But I did neither. I stopped yawning, too. Through the stable window, as the men disappeared for the shack, I saw a light in its doorway and two more of Macartney's men standing in it, black between the lamp and the gray morning glimmer.

I stirred some meal into the water Macartney's man had brought, drank a mouthful before I let my horse have just enough to rinse his mouth with, and threw on his saddle. It was flat on his neck that I came out the stable-door, and what Macartney's men meant to have done I don't know, for I was down the road toward La Chance like a rocket. And before I had made a mile I knew I had got off none too soon, for we were going to have snow at last and have it hard.

Before I cleared the corduroy road it cut my face in fine, stinging flakes, and by the time I was half-way to La Chance it was blinding me. It came on a wind, too, and I cursed it as I faced it, with my horse toiling through the heavy, sandy stuff that was too dry and cold to pack.

The twenty-two miles kept me most of the day. It was close on dusk when I fumbled through drifting, hissing snow and choking wind to the door of the La Chance stable; and the second I got inside I knew Macartney's man had told the truth, and Macartney had fired my teamsters with Billy Jones.

There was not a soul round the place, and ten hungry horses yelled at me at once as I stamped my half-frozen feet on the floor. I would have shouted for Charliet if it had not seemed quicker to feed them myself.

I yanked down a forkful of hay for them each, after I saw to my own horse. And if you think I was a fool to worry over dumb beasts, just that small delay made a difference in my immediate future that likely saved my life. If I had raced off for the house at once I might have met with—well, an accident. But that comes in later.

As it was I was a good twenty minutes in that stable. When I waded out into the swirling white dusk of snow and wind between me and the shack, I was just cautious enough, after the Halfway business, to stare hard through the blinding storm at the house I was making for, though I did not think Macartney was ripe to dare anything open against me at La Chance. But with that stare I knew abruptly that he was.

Massed just inside the open door of Dudley's shack, that was black dark but for one light in the living-room window, were a crowd of men that looked like nothing in the world but our own miners that I knew now for Hutton's, or Macartney's, gang. How he dared have them there, instead of in the bunkhouse, beat me, but it was them all right.

The wind was clear of snow for one second and I saw them plain. And they saw me.

Without one sound the whole gang jumped for me. I had my gun out, and I could have stopped the leaders before I had to get back against the stable door, but there was no need.

There was a shout behind me. The men checked, sprawling over each other in the snow, ludicrously, if I had been seeing much humor in things; and it was then it struck me that I should have had an accident if I had bundled straight into a dark house, instead of delaying in the stable till Macartney's gang got tired of waiting for me and bundled out themselves to see where I was. But I only wheeled with my gun in my fist, to Macartney's voice.

What I had expected to see with it I don't know. What I did see, stumbling through the drifts to me, was an indistinguishable figure that turned out to be two. For it was Macartney, carrying Marcia Wilbraham. And behind him, short-skirted to her knees, and with no coat but her miserable little blue sweater, my dream-girl.

Digitized by Google

I forgot Macartney could not know I knew he was Hutton, nor all the rest that I did know. I said:

"What hell's trick are you up to now?"

But Macartney only turned a played-out face to me.

"Take her from me, will you?" he snapped. "I'm done." He let Marcia slip down into the snow. "Wilbraham's killed!"

XIV

WOLVES—AND DUDLEY

IT WAS cleverly done. So was the desperate gesture of Macartney's hand across his bloodshot, congested eyes.

If I had not had Thompson's deuce of hearts in my pocket I might have doubted if Macartney really were Hutton, or had had any hand in the long tale of tragedy at La Chance. But as it was I knew in my inside soul, bleakly, that if Dudley was dead Macartney had killed him as only luck had kept him from killing me.

I saw him give a quick, flicking sign to his men with the fingers of the hand that still covered his eyes, and knew I was right in the last thing, anyhow, for the men straggled back from us, as to an order. They were to do nothing now, before Paulette and Marcia, if their first instructions had been to ambush inside the shack, to dispose of me when I got back from the Halfway, which I had not been meant to do.

I did not drop my gun-hand, nor fling the truth at Macartney. But I made no move to pick up Marcia. I said:

"How d'ye mean Dudley's killed? Who killed him?"

"Wolves!" If Macartney meant me to think he was too sick to answer properly, he was not, for he spoke suddenly to the bunkhouse men: "There is no good in your waiting round, nor looking any more. They got Mr. Wilbraham, and—" he turned his head to me again—"they —— nearly got me!"

Later I wished sincerely that they had, for it would have saved me some trouble. Then, all I wanted was to get even with Macartney myself. I said:

"Pick up Marcia and get into the house. You can talk there."

Macartney glanced at me. Secretly, perhaps, neither of us wanted to give the other a chance at him by stooping for a heavy girl; I know I was not going to do it. But Paulette must have thought I was. She sprang past me with smooth, effortless strength, and lifted Marcia as if she were nothing.

Macartney started, as if he realized he had been a fool not to have done it himself, and got into the house before us, where he could have slipped cartridges into his gun. I knew afterward that it was empty.

But Paulette had moved off with Marcia, and a peremptory gesture of her back-flung head that kept Macartney behind her. I came behind him. And because he had no idea of all I knew about him he took things as they looked on top. With Paulette leading, and me on Macartney's heels, we filed into the living-room. There was a light there, but the fire was out. I guessed Charliet was hiding under his bed, in which I wronged him, but I was not worrying over Charliet nor cold rooms then.

Paulette laid Marcia down on the floor and I stood in the doorway. I did not believe the bunkhouse men would come back till an open row suited Macartney's book, but there was no harm in commanding the outside doors of the shack, all the same. And the sudden thought that we were all in the living-room but Dudley, and that he would never come back to it, gripped my soul between fury and anguish.

"Get it out—about Dudley!" I said; and I did not care if my voice was thick.

Macartney looked over at me just as an honest, capable superintendent ought to have looked.

"I can't; because I don't know it. All I do know's this: After you went off yesterday, Wilbraham got to drinking; the wolves began to howl round the place after dark, and he said they drove him mad. He got a gun and went out after them—and he never came back. I didn't even know he was gone till midnight. I thought he'd shut himself in his office like he often does, till I heard shots outside and found he wasn't in the house. I turned the bunkhouse men out to look for him. When that lot you saw waiting in the shack for me came back toward morning, and said they couldn't find a sign of Wilbraham and the bush was so full of wolves they were scared to go on looking, I went myself——"

"And took girls—" I remembered the reek of my wolf-doped clothes till I fancied I could smell the stuff, there in the room;

Digitized by Google

thought of a half-drunk man walking out on a like baited track—"took girls into bush like that!"

"They followed me," curtly. "I didn't know it till it was too late to send them home. I couldn't have turned Miss Wilbraham back, anyhow; she was half-crazy. And if you're thinking of wolves, it was getting daylight, and——"

He hesitated, and I could have filled in his pause for myself, remembering how that wolf-dope acted; two lambs could have moved in the bush with safety, so long as they kept away from where it was laid on the ground. But Macartney filled it in differently:

"And, anyhow, it was well they did come! It was Marcia found Wilbraham."

I don't think I had really believed Dudley was dead till then. I stared at Marcia lying on the floor, as purple in the face from over-exertion and fright as though she had had an apoplectic fit; at Paulette stooping over her, silent, white round the mouth. She looked up at me, and her eyes gave me fierce warning, if I had needed it.

"Marcia got afraid and bolted for home—the wrong way," she said sharply. "When I ran after her she was standing in some spruces, screaming and pointing in front of her. I saw the blood on the ground, and—here's Dudley's cap! I found it, all chewed, close by."

She pulled a rag of fur from under her snow-caked sweater, and as the stale reek of the Skunk's Misery wolf-dope rose from the thing I knew the smell in the room had been no fancy, and how Dudley Wilbraham had died. I wheeled and saw Macartney's face, the face of a man who took me for a fool whose nose would tell him nothing.

"D'ye mean that was all you found?" I got out.

"No. The rest was there. But it was unrecognizable! Even I couldn't look at it. It was pretty tough for girls. I shot one wolf that we scared off it, but I couldn't do anything more. I couldn't lift—it. But—Dudley's coat was on it."

He had turned so white that I remembered his faint in the assay office, like you do remember things that don't matter. I would have thought him chicken-hearted for a wholesale murderer, if it had not been for the cold hate in his eyes.

"D'ye mean you left Dudley—out there in the bush? Where the devil was Baker, that black-and-white weazel you set to look after him? I'll bet he saved his skin! Where is he?"

"Baker's missing too," simply; and I did not believe it. "And I don't see what else I could have done but leave Dudley. None of the men were with me to carry him in; it had begun to snow; and in another hour I couldn't have kept the track back home. As it was, Miss Marcia played out; I had to carry her most of the way. And that's all there is to it," with sudden impatience, "except that Wilbraham's dead, and Baker's missing. If he wasn't he'd have brought Dudley in."

"Yes," I said.

I saw Charliet's head poke round the corner of the kitchen door, and called to him to carry Marcia to her room for Paulette, and to get fires going and something to eat; for the queer part of it was that there seemed to be two of me, and one of them was thinking it was starving. It saw Charliet and my dream-girl carry Marcia out, and the other me turned on Macartney.

"By gad! There's one thing more," I said slowly. "You don't have to go on playing moving-pictures, Dick Hutton, nor using an alias either! You've killed Dudley, and Thompson, and to a good guess Dunn and Collins, if I can't be sure—and you'd have had me first of all, if your boulder and your wolf-dope hadn't failed you on the Caraquet road!"

MACARTNEY'S furious, surprised oath was real.

"I don't know what you mean! Who on earth—" but he stammered on it. "Who d'ye mean by Hutton?"

"You," said I. "And if you're not him, I don't know why. There's no one else who would have followed Paulette Valenka out here. I don't believe what you've done's been all revenge on the girl you tried to get into trouble about Van Ruyne's emeralds because she'd turned you down, nor scare that Dudley would worm out the truth about that, either—but if it was to jump the La Chance mine too, you're busted!

"Your accident serial-story won't go down. I knew about your wolf-dope business long ago, and do you suppose this—" I shoved Dudley's cap under his nose—"doesn't tell me how you limed the trap you set for Dudley last night, nor what you smeared on his clothes when he was too full

Digitized by Google

to smell it? I know what brought the wolves to howl round this house, if I don't know how you shoved Dudley out to them. I know it was a home-made raid you had down at the assay office, and—I've been to Skunk's Misery!"

"Well?" said Macartney thickly.

"Well enough! I've got Thompson's deuce of hearts you didn't see was missing when you gave me back his pack! With any luck I'll pay you out for that, and our four mill men, and Dudley; not here, where you can fight and die quick, but outside—where they've things like gallows! Oh, you would, would you?"

For his empty gun just missed my face as he made a lightning jump to bring it down on my head, and my left hand stopped him up just under the ear. I ought to have shot him. I don't know why I held back.

I was so mad with rage when he dropped that I could have jumped on him like a lumberman and tramped the heart out of him. But I only lit for the kitchen and Charliet's clothesline. As I got back and knelt down by the man who had called himself Macartney, Thompson rose up before me, as he had sat in that very room, playing his lonely solitaire; and the four dead men in the assay office; and Dudley, only I had no grief for Dudley, because it was drowned in rage.

I rolled Macartney round and round in the clothes-line, whether he was really Hutton or not, and I meant to have the truth out of him about that and everything else before I was done. But when I had him gagged with a pair of socks and a towel while he was still knocked out, I sat back on my heels to think. And I damned myself up and down because I had not shot Macartney out of hand.

I had Macartney all right. But I had next door to nothing else, unless I could find a safe place to jail him while I disposed of his men. Now, if they chose to rush me, I could not hold the eight shack windows against them, if Paulette and I might each hold a door. If I took to the bush with Paulette and Marcia, and Macartney, I had nowhere on earth to go. There could be no piling that ill-assorted company on horses and putting out for Caraquet, with the road choked with snow, even if I could have got by Macartney's garrison at the Half-way.

Crossing Lac Tremblant—that by tomorrow would be lying sweetly level under a treacherous scum of lolly and drifted snow, ready to drown us all like Thompson—I cursed, and put out of the question. That lake was no lake, offered about as good a thoroughfare as rats get in a rain-barrel. Whereas, to hold Macartney at La Chance till I downed his gang. . . .

"By gad!" I flashed out. "I can do it—in Thompson's abandoned stope!"

It was not as crazy as it sounds. Thompson's measly entrance tunnel would only admit one man at a time, and I could hold it alone till doomsday. Macartney could be safely jailed inside the stope till I had wiped out his men; Paulette would be safe; and there remained no doubtful quantities but Marcia and Charliet the cook.

I guessed I could scare Marcia, and that Charliet would probably be on my side anyway. If he were, and sneaked down now to provision the stope, the thing would be dead easy, even to firewood, for Thompson had yanked in a couple of loads of mine props and left them there.

I lit out into the passage to hunt Charliet and find out where the bunkhouse men had gone to. But there was no sign of either in the wind and snow outside the shack. And, as I bolted the door on the storm and turned for the kitchen, I saw my dream-girl standing outside Marcia's room.

She was dead white in the dim candlelight that shone through Marcia's half-open door. I thought of that as I jumped to her, and I would have done better to have thought of Marcia. I could see her from the passage, lying on her bed, purple-faced still, and with her eyes shut. But one glance was all I gave to Marcia. I said:

"For God's sake, Paulette, don't look like that. I'm topsides with Macartney, for now! Got him tied up. Come into the kitchen till I speak to you. I want Charliet." But as I pushed Paulette before me into the kitchen just across the passage from Marcia's room I stopped speaking. She was holding out Thompson's case of cards, open, with that scrawled deuce of hearts on the top.

"Charliet's gone—run away somewhere," her chest labored as if she were making herself go on breathing, "and you dropped—this! I ran out from Marcia to see what you were doing with Macartney," she hesitated on the name, and you'd dropped this. "I—you know Macartney killed Dudley, really; does this mean he killed Thompson, too?"

Digitized by Google

"You can say Macartney's real name," I snapped bitterly. "I've known he was Dick Hutton, ever since last night."

But Paulette only gasped as if she did not care whether I knew it or not—

"Where—how did you get these cards?"

I told her, and she gave a queer low cry.

"Dudley's dead, and I'm past crying." Her voice never rose when she was moved; it went down to "D" below the line on a violin. "I'm past everything but wishing I was dead too, for I'm the reason that brought Dick Hutton here as Macartney. Oh, you should have let me meet him that night. I wasn't only going to meet him—I meant to go away with him before morning. It would have been too late for poor innocent old Thompson, but it would have saved the four mill men—and Dudley!"

She had said she was past crying, but her voice thrilled through me worse than tears; and it might have thrilled Marcia in her room across the passage, if I'd remembered Marcia.

"God knows Dudley was good to me—but it's no use talking of that now. What have you done with Macart—with Dick Hutton—that you said you had him safe for now?"

"Knocked him out and tied him up with the clothesline in the living-room till I can take him to Caraquet to be hanged!"

"You ought to have killed him," the girl answered very slowly. "I would have, when we found Dudley, only he'd taken my gun. At least I believe he had. He said I'd lost it. And I'm afraid, without it, while Dick Hutton's alive!"

I looked at her ghastly face, and I suppose I was a fool, for I shoved my gun into her hand and told her to keep it. I'd get another. I would have caught her in my arms if it had not been for remembering Dudley, who was dead because the two of us had held our tongues. "Look here," I said irrelevantly, "d'ye know Marcia thinks Macartney wants to marry her?"

"He doesn't want to marry any one, except me," Paulette retorted scornfully, and once more I should have remembered Marcia across the passage. Only I didn't. "He's made love to Marcia, of course, for a blind, like he did everything else. If we could make her realize that, or that he killed Dudley as surely as if he'd lifted his own hand to him——"

But I cut her off:

"By gad! Paulette, what sticks me is what Macartney did all this for!"

"Me," said Paulette very bitterly. "At least, at first; I'm not so sure now. When I first met Dick it was in Russia. He'd got into trouble about a copper mine—you've heard Macartney talk of the Urals—" if we both spoke of him as if he were two different people neither of us noticed. "He came to me in Petrograd, and I helped him. But when I came to America, alone, I turned him out of my flat. He may have loved me—I don't know. But when I wouldn't marry him he said he'd make me; that he'd hound me wherever I went and disgrace me till I had to give in and come to him. And he must have done it at the Houstons', if I don't know how. The police would have me for those emeralds I never took, if they knew where I was now.

"I can't see where Dick could have been, nor how he managed the thing, but all the rest Dudley told you and him about that night at the Houstons' was right. I did give Van Ruyne sleeping stuff to keep him quiet while I got away, but it was because it came over me, the second I knew those emeralds were gone, that Dick must be in that house; that he'd come in and threaten me till I went away with him. And I'd have died, first. I got out, and it was just the Blessed Virgin," simply, "that made me find Dudley's car stalled outside the Houstons' gate!"

"D'ye mean you'd known Dudley before?"

She nodded.

"I'd met him; and I liked him because he never made love to me. He hadn't been at the Houstons' that night; he was only coming back from Southampton, alone, without any chauffeur. I knew no one would ever think he'd helped me, so I just got into his car.

"But I never should have let him bring me here," bitterly. "I ought to have known Dick would find me and play gold robberies here to pay Dudley out. He told me he would, unless I'd go away with him, that very night you heard me talking to him, but I didn't see how he could work it. I thought I could tire him out by always balking him, till that night I didn't meet him and he killed those four men. Then I knew I couldn't fight him. And the reason was that Dick's a finished mining engineer, who never ran straight in his life!"

Digitized by Google

"What?" I knew both things, only I saw no connection with Paulette.

But she nodded.

"He could get good work anywhere, but he won't work honestly. All he cares for is the excitement of big things that he can get at crookedly. That was why he tried a *coup* with that copper mine in the Urals, and had to clear out of Russia. And the La Chance mine, that he came to contemptuously, and just to get hold of me, is a big thing too! No—listen! You don't know how big yet, for you've been kept in the dark.

"But Dick knows; and that's why I began to know I couldn't manage him any more, and why I don't think it's me he has done all he has for, nor that it was even to pay out Dudley. I believe it was to get the mine!"

"Then why, in Heaven's name, didn't you tell Dudley who he was?"

"I couldn't make Dudley listen, at first. Then," very low, "I didn't dare. I knew it would mean Dudley got killed. I never thought that—would happen anyway!"

"There was me!" I was stung unbearably. "You must have known, ever since the night I first came here, that there was always me!"

"Y-you," she stumbled oddly on it. "I couldn't tell *you!* Oh, can't you see I was afraid, Nicky, that you might—get killed for me, too?"

For the first time that night she looked up as if she saw me—me, Nicky Stretton, dark, fierce and dirty—and not Dudley Wilbraham and the dead. My name in that voice of hers would have caught me at my heart, if I had dared to be thinking of her.

But I was not. It had flashed through me that Marcia's door had been half-open when we went into the kitchen, and that now it was shut.

It was a trifling thing to make my heart turn over, but it did. I covered the passage in two jumps to the living-room door. But as I flung it open all I had time to see was that the window was open too; and Marcia standing by it in her horrible green shooting clothes, just as she had lain on her bed, with a crowd of bunkhouse men swarming through the open sash behind her, and Macartney—Macartney standing on his feet without any clothes-line, and his gun in his hand.

I SAW, like you do see things, how it had all happened. I had misjudged Macartney's intellect about the bunkhouse men. He had had them within call.

But it was the virtuous Marcia who had freed him. She had shut her door, slipped out of her window and into the living-room, and cut Macartney's rope. She had no earthly reason to connect him with Dudley's death, except from overhearing Paulette and me in the kitchen; she knew nothing of the bottle of wolf-bait that had been meant to smash in my wagon, nor that Dudley—so full up with drink and drugs that he could not have smelled even that mixture of skunks and sulphid—could easily have been sent out reeking of it, into bush that reeked of it too. And that second she screamed at me:

"You liar, Nicky Stretton! He's not Hutton—he's Macartney!"

But Macartney fired full in my face.

It was Marcia's flying jump that made him miss me. Even though his very bullet was one of hers that she always carried in her pockets, and must have given to him the first thing, I don't think she had been prepared to see me killed. I didn't wait to see.

I was down the passage to Paulette before Macartney could get in a second shot, as he and some of the bunkhouse men tore out of the living-room after me. I fired into the brown of them with my own gun that I snatched from Paulette, thought it checked them, and lit out of the kitchen door into the wind and the dark, and the raving, swirling snow, with my dream-girl's hand in mine. We plunged knee-deep, waist-deep through the drifts for our lives—mine, anyhow.

"Thompson's stope," I gasped, and she said yes.

I couldn't see an inch before me, but I think we would have made it, since Macartney could not see either. I knew we were far ahead of him, but that was all I did know, till I heard myself shout to Paulette.

"Run!" and felt my legs double under me.

If something hit me on the head like a ton of bricks I had no sense of what had happened, as people have in books. I only realized I had been knocked out when I felt myself coming to. It seemed quite natural to be deadly faint and sick, and lying like a

Digitized by Google

log, till I put out my hand and touched hard rock.

"I don't see how it's rock," I thought dully. "It ought to be snow. Something hit me, out in the snow with Paulette!"

And with that sense came back to me, like a red-hot iron in my brain. I had been out in the snow with Paulette; one of Macartney's men must have hit me a swipe on the head and got her from me; but where in Heaven's name was Paulette now? The thought made me so wild that I scrambled to my knees to find out in what ungodly hole I had been put myself. I had been carried somewhere, and the rock under me felt like the mine.

But somehow the darkness round me did not smell like a mine where men worked every day. It smelled cold, desolate, abandoned, like—and suddenly I knew where Macartney's men had carried me when I was knocked out. It was no comfort to me that it was to the very place where I had meant to jail Macartney and hide Paulette, where Charliet and I were to have stood off Macartney's men.

"Thompson's stope!" I gasped. "It's there Macartney's put me!"

I crawled, sick and dizzy, to what ought to have been the tunnel and the tunnel entrance, opening on the storm out-of-doors. The tunnel was there all right. But as I fumbled to what ought to have been the open entrance stillness met me, instead of a rush of wind; piled rock met my groping hands instead of piled snow. I was in Thompson's old stope all right, only Macartney had sealed up the only way I could ever get out.

I shoved and dug and battered as uselessly as a rat in a trap, and suddenly knew it was just what I was. Macartney had not even taken the trouble to kill me; not to avoid visible murder at this stage of the game, when only the enemy was left, excepting a duped woman and a captured one; but for the sheer pleasure of realizing the long, slow death that must get me in the end.

"Die here—I've got to die here," I heard my own voice in my ears. "And my God, Paulette! Macartney's got Paulette!"

And in the darkness behind me somebody slipped on a stone.

I had not thought I could ever feel light and fierce again. I was both as I swung round.

XV

THE PLACE OF DEPARTED SPIRITS

Every man carries his skull under his face—But God alone knows the marks on it.

—*George Wampus.*

FOR A man moved, silent and furtive, in the tunnel between me and the stope.

At the knowledge something flared up in me that had been pretty well burnt out, and that was hope. That any one was in the place showed Macartney had either put a guard on me, which meant Thompson's abandoned stope was not sealed so securely as I thought, or else it was he himself facing me in the dark, and I might get even with him yet. I let out a string of curses at him on the chance. There was not one single thing he had done to me, Paulette, or any one else that I did not put a name to. And I trusted Macartney, or any man he had left in the ink-dark stope, would be fool enough to jump at me for what I said.

But no one jumped. And out of the graveyard blackness in front of me came a muffled chuckle.

It rooted me stone still, and I dare swear it would have you. For the chuckle was Dunn's, who was dead and buried, and Collins with him. But suddenly I was blazing angry, for the chuckle came again, and—dead man's or not—it was mocking.

I jumped to it and caught a live throat, hard. But before I could choke the breath out of it a voice, that was not Dunn's, shouted at me:

"Hold your horses, for any sake, Stretton! It's us."

A match rasped, flared in my eyes, and I saw Dunn and Collins! Saw Dunn's stubbly hair, clipped close till it stood on end, as it had on the skull I'd said a prayer over and buried; saw Collins, standing on the long shank bones I knew lay under a cairn in the bush.

I stared, dazed, facing the two boys I could have sworn were dead and buried. And instead Dunn gasped wheezingly from the rock where I had let him drop, and Collins drawled as if he and I had met yesterday:

"We heard we were dead! But it wasn't us you buried—nor any of Hutton's men either, for he'd have missed 'em. I expect you'd better put your funeral down to two

Digitized by Google

stray prospectors and let it go at that!" He looked curiously into my face. "You don't seem to have got much yourself by playing the giddy goat with Hutton!"

In the dying flicker of his match I saw his young sneering eyes, as he called Macartney "Hutton," and realized furiously that Paulette had been right, not only that Dunn and Collins were alive, but that they were on Macartney's side. I blazed out at the two of them:

"So you've been in with Hutton all along, you young swine! I've been a —— fool! I ought to have guessed Hutton had bought you!"

Dunn let out a sharp oath, but Collins only threw down the glowing end of his match.

"I wouldn't say we were on Hutton's pay-roll exactly, since you seem to have found out Macartney's real name at last," he retorted scornfully. "We've been on our own, even since we saw fit to disappear and bunk in here. Though by luck Hutton hasn't guessed it, or we wouldn't be here now!"

"I don't know that it's any too clear why you are here," I flung out hotly. "D'ye mean to say you've been living here, hiding, ever since you cleared out and I thought the wolves ate you? That you knew all along who Macartney was—and never told me?"

"Not exactly here, if you mean Thompson's old stope you're corked up in; but of course we knew Macartney was Hutton," Collins returned categorically. "As for telling you about him—well, we couldn't be any too sure you weren't Hutton's man yourself, till tonight!"

"What?" said I.

But Collins apologized calmly.

"We were fools, of course; but we couldn't tell we'd made a mistake. We didn't have as much fun as a bag of monkeys while we were making it, either, especially when there was that trouble in the assay office. We came in on the tail-end of that, only we'd no guns and it was too late to help our poor chaps, anyway. Besides, we thought you—" but he checked abruptly. "It's too long to explain in this freezing hole. Let's get out! You're not corked up here so dead tight as Hutton-Macartney thinks." And in the dark I knew he grinned. "Only I imagine we'd better decide what we're going to do—before he discovers that!"

"Do? I've got to get Paulette."

But I lurched as I turned back to the blocked tunnel entrance, and Collins caught me by the shoulder.

"You can't get her," said he succintly, "unless we help you? Going to trust us?"

It didn't seem to me that I had any particular choice; so I said yes. Then I gaped like a fool. Dunn and Collins had me by the arms and were marching me through the dark, not toward the tunnel where I'd been slung in, but back through Thompson's black abandoned stope, as if it had been Broadway, till the side wall of it brought us up.

"Over you go," said Collins gruffly.

He gave me a boost against the smooth wall of the stope, and my clawing fingers caught on the edge of a sharp shelf of stone. I swung myself on it mechanically and felt my feet go through the solid stope wall into space. There was an opening in the living rock, and as Collins lit another match where he stood below me, I saw it: a practicable manhole, slanting down behind my shelf so sharply that it must have been invisible from Thompson's stope, even to working candle-light.

Collins and Dunn swarmed up beside me, and the next second we all three slid through the black slit behind our ledge, and out somewhere else. Collins lit a candle end, and I saw we were in a second tunnel, a remarkably amateur, unsafe tunnel, too, if I'd been worrying about trifles—but not Thompson's!

The thing made me start, and Collins grinned.

"More convenient exit than old Thompson's, only we don't live here! If you come on you'll see."

He and his candle disappeared round a loose-looking boulder to a dark hole in the tunnel side, and his voice continued blandly as I stumbled after.

"Natural cave this tunnel was when we found it, this second cave leading out of it, and a passage from here to—outside!" He waved his hand round him as I stood dumb. "Our little country home!"

What I saw was a small round cave, the glow of a fire under a shaft that led all betraying smoke heaven knew where into the side of the hill, and two spruce beds with blankets. The permanent look of the place was the last straw on my own blind idiocy of never suspecting Macartney, and I burst out——

Digitized by Google

"Why the devil, with all you knew, couldn't you have brought Paulette here and hidden her?"

"Charliet said we should have," Collins nodded when I stared. "Oh yes, there's more to that French Canadian than just cook! He's been in the know about us here all this time, or we'd have been in a nice hole for grub. Mind, I don't say he's brave——"

"He was under his bed when I wanted him tonight," I agreed with some bitterness.

"Was he?" Collins exclaimed electrically. "He was here, giving us the office about you! He tore down and told us you'd got Hutton, and we'd better light out and help you—but when we turned out it looked more as if Hutton had got you! You and Miss Paulette must have walked straight into an ambush of his men when you raced out the kitchen door, and I guess one of them landed you a swipe on the head. Anyhow, Dunn and I met a procession with you frog-marched in the middle of it, that was more than we could manage without guns. So we kind of retired and let the men cork you into Thompson's stope. And you bet they did it. Not six of us could ever have got you out, and if we hadn't known a private way. We——"

I cursed him:

"My God, stop talking! It's not me I want to hear about. Where was Paulette? D'ye mean you followed me and left her—left a girl—to Macartney? I—I've got to go for her!"

But Collins caught me as I turned.

"Macartney hadn't got her—she wasn't there! We hoofed Charliet off to find her first thing; he'll bring her here, as soon as it's safe to make a getaway. We'd have brought her ourselves, only the show would have been spoiled if Hutton had spotted us, and we had to make time too, to get back here and waltz you out of Thompson's mausoleum. It'll be time enough for you to go for Miss Paulette when she doesn't turn up. You're not fit now, anyway."

I felt him staring into my face.

"Had anything to eat all day, except a fight and a hard ride?" he demanded irrelevantly, in a voice that sounded oddly far off.

I shook my head, and the smell of coffee smote my famished nostrils as he took a tin pot off the fire. I knew how nearly I had been done when the scalding stuff picked me up like brandy.

"You're sure about Paulette?" I gasped. "Remember, Macartney was bound to get her!"

"Well, he didn't," Collins returned composedly. "I bet he's looking for her right now, and I'm dead sure he won't find her. Charliet wasn't born yesterday. He'll bring her here all right."

"I'll wait ten minutes," I gave in abruptly, all the more that I knew I couldn't do anything else till I filled my empty stomach, and there was something I wanted to know. "What did you mean just now, about not being sure of me with Hutton?"

Dunn spoke up for the first time.

"It was Miss Paulette. We thought it was you we heard her talking to, two nights in the dark. So when she drove off to Caraquet with you and the gold, after we'd heard her say she couldn't trust you—at least, the man we thought was you—we didn't know whether you were in with Hutton or not, nor what kind of a game you were playing."

"Me?" said I blankly. "I suppose it never struck you that I believed the man playing the game was Collins, till I thought I'd buried him, and decided it must be some one who never was employed round this mine!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Collins, and suddenly knocked the wits out of me by muttering that at least we'd both had sense enough to know Miss Valenka was square.

"Valenka! D'ye mean you knew who she was, too?" I stuttered.

"Dunn did," Collins nodded. "I only knew Hutton. But I knew more than my prayers about him, and Dunn told me about the girl. So we kind of kept guard for her; and watched you and Hutton, till the day we had the row with him!"

"In the mine? He told me."

Only half of me. The rest was listening for the sound of footsteps. But the place was still.

"In Thompson's stope," Collins corrected dryly. "You see, we thought you and Hutton-Macartney were working together, and we didn't see our way to tackling the two of you at once. So when you went off to Caraquet with Miss Paulette, we thought we'd get Hutton cleared out of this before you got back again. We kind of let him see us leave work in the mine and sneak into the old stope. When he came after us we dropped on him with what we knew of him; and between us we knew a deal.

Digitized by Google

"We gave him his choice about leaving the neighborhood that minute, or our going straight to Wilbraham and telling who he was, and what he was there for—which was where we slipped up. He'd the gall to tell us to our faces that we'd no pull over him, because we were doing private work in Thompson's stope and stealing Wilbraham's gold out of it. And that rather gave us the check."

"But—why? There wasn't six cents worth of gold there to steal!"

Collins smiled with shameless simplicity.

"I know. But stealing gold was exactly what we were doing, only it wasn't in Thompson's old stope. We'd have been caught with the goods on us though, if any one had fussed round there to investigate. We found our way in here—" he jerked his head toward his amateur tunnel—"by accident, in Thompson's time, one day when the stope happened to be empty; and we burrowed on to what looked like the anti-clinal, before we heard the stope shift coming and had to slide out. But we'd seen enough to keep us burrowing.

"We couldn't do much, even after Hutton ran the other tunnel half a mile down the cliff and caught gold there; but we kind of slipped in, evenings, when you missed us out of the bunkhouse—" he grinned again—"and got the bearings of that vein. And you bet we had to find a way to stay with it: it was too good to leave! We weren't going to work in Wilbraham's mine just for our health and days wages, when we'd struck our own gold. So we reckoned we'd just—disappear. But we didn't get out as sharp as we did, simply on account of our own private affairs.

"Macartney-Hutton drew a gun the day we had the row he lied to you about, and I guess we just legged it out of Thompson's stope by the front way in time to make the bush with our lives on us. Macartney thought he'd scared us and we'd lit for Caraquet; but we lit back again after dark. We crawled in here, by our back entrance you haven't seen yet, and here we've been ever since. We didn't confide in you, because you seemed pretty thick with Macartney, if you come to think of it; and it seemed a hefty kind of lie, too, when you told Charliet you'd buried us. I rather think that is all, till tonight."

His indifferent drawl stopped as if it were cut off with a knife.

"My God, Stretton!" he jerked. "I'd forgotten! Was it true—what Charliet told us tonight—about Dudley Wilbraham?"

I was eating stuff the silent Dunn had supplied, but I put the meat down.

"Wilbraham's killed," I heard my own voice say; and then the rest of it. How Paulette had found Dudley's chewed, wolf-doped cap, and Marcia found Dudley, silent in the silent bush, where the last wolf was sneaking away. I would not have known Collins's face as he asked what I meant about wolf-dope, now, and when I'd thought I was swearing at Macartney in Thompson't stope.

I told him, with my ears straining for Charliet and a girl creeping in to us through Collins's back way out. But all I heard was silence, that thick, underground silence that fills the ears like wool. I had said I would wait ten minutes, and nine of them were gone. I don't think I spoke. Dunn muttered suddenly—

"They're not coming!"

Collins shook his head and coldly damned himself and me for two fools who had lain low, when out in the open together we could have stopped Macartney from getting Dudley, if we couldn't have helped old Thompson.

He never mentioned Paulette, nor his trusted cook. But he rose, lit a second candle, and led the way out of his warm burrow by a dark hole opposite the one we had entered by, and into a cramped alley where we had to walk bent double. It felt as if it ran a mile before it turned in a sharp right angle. Collins pinched out his light and turned on me.

"Just what are you going to do?"

"Get Paulette," said I.

"M-m," said Collins. "Well, here's where we grope! Get hold of my heels when I lie down, and don't crowd me."

And that was every word that came out of either of us as we wormed head first down a slope of smooth stone, and cold fresh air abruptly smote my face. In front of us was an opening, out of the bowels of the hill into the night and the snow. Rooted juniper hung down over it in an impervious curtain, as it hung everywhere from the rocks at La Chance.

Collins pushed it aside, and the two of us were out—out of Thompson's stope where Macartney had meant to bury me alive.

Digitized by Google

XVI

DEAR DUDLEY

FOR TWO breaths I did not know where I was. It was still snowing, and the night was wild, such a night as we might not have again for weeks. Any one could move in it secure as behind a curtain, for I could not see a yard before my face, and not a track could lie five minutes, out in the open. But suddenly the familiarity of the place hit me till I could have laughed if I had been there on any other business.

Collins's long passage had wormed behind Thompson's stope, behind the La Chance stables; and it was no wonder he had found it easy enough to get supplies from Charliet. All he had to do was to cross the clearing from the jutting rock that shielded his private entrance and walk in Charliet's kitchen door. I moved to it, and Collins grabbed at me in the smothering snow.

"Hang on; you don't know who's there! Wait till I ring up Charliet, number one Wolf."

He stood back from me, and far, far off, with a perfect illusion of distance broken by the wind, I heard a wolf howl; once, and then twice again. If he had not stood beside me I could not have believed the cry came from Collins's throat. But remembering Dudley, it had an ill-omened sound to me.

"Shut up!" I breathed sharply.

Collins might have remembered Dudley, too.

"I wasn't going to do it again," he muttered, "but I've had to use it for a signal. It's been a fashionable kind of a sound round here, though I hadn't sense enough to know Macartney brought the beasts that made it. But Charliet knows my howl. He'll come out, if he's—drop quick!"

But both of us had dropped already. Some one had flung open the kitchen door and fired a charge of buckshot out into the night. I heard it scatter over my head, and a burst of uproar on its heels told me Charliet's kitchen was crowded with Macartney's men. Somebody, not Charliet, shouted over it—

"What the devil's that for?"

And another voice yelled something about wolves, and firing to scare them.

"The boss'll scare you if you get to firing guns this night," the first voice swore; and a man laughed insolently.

Then the kitchen door banged and Collins sprang up electrically.

"I don't like this one bit," he breathed. "Macartney's not in the house, or his men wouldn't dare be yelling like that; and Charliet's not there either, or he'd have been out. That devil must have got him somewhere—him and Miss Paulette! Can't you see there's not a light in the shack, bar the kitchen? Come on!"

But I was gone already, round the corner of the shack to Paulette's side of it, and I knew better. There was a light in Paulette's room, shining through a hole in the heavy wooden shutters she had had made for herself, long before I guessed why she wanted them and their bars. It ran through me like fire that Macartney was in that room, deaf to any kind of yells from the kitchen, to everything but Paulette's voice; and nobody but a man who has had to think it can guess what that thought was like to me, out there in the snow.

I made for my own window, but it was shut; and God knew who might be watching me out of it, as I had watched Macartney one night, before I knew he was Hutton. I thought:

"By gad, Nicky Stretton, you'll go in the front door!

For that, with me shut up to die in Thompson's stope, and not one other soul alive to interfere with him, was the last thing Macartney would think to lock. Nor had he. The latch lifted just as usual, and I walked in.

The long passage through the shack was dark and, after the storm outside, dead silent. It was empty too, as the living-room was empty; but what I thought of was my dream-girl's door. That was open, a foot-wide space, and somebody inside it sobbed sickeningly. But if Macartney was there he was not speaking.

I daresay I forgot I had no gun to kill him with. I crept forward in the soundless moccasins I had reason to thank heaven were my only wear, and suddenly felt Collins beside me, in his stocking feet.

"Steady on," he breathed, "I tell you he isn't there! If he were, you couldn't get him. One shout and he'd have the whole gang out on us."

I knew afterward that he'd stubbed his toe on Marcia Wilbraham's little revolver she'd dropped on the passage floor, and was ready to keep my back if the gang did come;

Digitized by Google

but then I hardly heard him. I stood rooted at Paulette's door, staring, staring in, and Paulette was not there, Macartney was not there.

What I saw was Marcia Wilbraham with her back to me, crying hysterically, as I might have known Paulette would never cry; and flinging out of a trunk, as if Paulette were gone or dead, every poor little bit of clothes and oddments that were my dream-girl's own.

I can't write what that made me feel. Ribbons, bits of laces I had no business with, little blue stockings, shoes grew into a heap; and I would have been fool enough to jump in on Marcia and shake out of her how she dared to touch them, whether Paulette were dead or alive, if Collins had not gripped me hard.

"The emeralds," he muttered. "She's rooting for them!"

I had pretty well forgotten there ever were any emeralds. I stared at him like a fool.

"Van Ruyne's emeralds—she thinks Miss Paulette has 'em," Collins's lips explained soundlessly. "And they're round Macartney's own neck—seen them. Dunn and I were going to swipe them, only we couldn't."

I damned the emeralds. What I wanted of Marcia was to find out what had become of Paulette. But Collins gripped me harder.

"Let her see you, and you'll never know," he breathed fiercely. "She'd give one yell and we'd be done. Macartney's either got the girl and Charliet, or they're lost in the snow and he's hunting for them. Let's get some guns and go see—we're crazy to stay here!"

I nodded mechanically. I knew what it meant for a girl to be lost in the snow in such a night as I had just closed the shack door on, even with Charliet beside her; how Collins and I might tramp, search—yes, and call, too—uselessly, beside the very drift where she lay smothered.

And then I realized I was a fool. Macartney would not give her a chance to get lost. He had her somewhere, her and Charliet; and Collins and I had to take her from him. But something inexplicable stopped me as I turned for the shack door. Macartney had never been a Winter at La Chance. He had no snow-shoes. Charliet had some, I didn't know where. But I had two pairs in my own room. That inexplicable check told me they would be priceless, though I knew it was silly.

If Macartney had Paulette he would not be marching her through the snow. All the places I could search for her were the stable and the assay office. But I backed Collins noiselessly past the room where Marcia was still pulling round Paulette's trunks, with a noise that covered any we could make, and the two of us ended up in my room in the black dark.

I stood Collins at the door while I felt for my snow-shoes. I knew it was crazy and I was just obsessed, but I got them. I didn't get much else. I couldn't find my rifle I had hoped for, and only a couple of boxes of revolver cartridges were in my open trunk that I guessed Marcia had gone through too. I would have felt like wringing her neck, if it had not been for Paulette and Macartney. I had no room for outside emotions till I knew about them.

I slid back to my doorway to get Collins, and he was gone. Where to I had no earthly idea. I looked to see if he had been cracked enough to tackle Marcia, and Marcia was along on her knees, chucking all Paulette's things back into her trunk again.

The place suddenly felt dead quiet. She had stopped sobbing, and I believe she would have heard a mouse move. There was that kind of a listening look about her. And it was that minute, that unsuitable, inimical minute, that I heard some one move. Outside, on the doorstep, somebody stumbled.

The latch lifted, the door swung in—and I jumped to meet Macartney with not one thing on me but some fool snow-shoes and a pocketful of useless cartridges. But I brought up dead still and rigid.

"Charliet—oh Charliet, come quick," whispered Paulette. She was snow from head to foot where she stood in the shack door. "I couldn't find——

But she recoiled as she saw me, against the light Marcia had burning inside her own half-open door.

"Oh my God, Nicky!" she cried in a voice that brought my soul alive, that fool's soul that had lost her. She caught at me like a child, incredulously, wildly. "Oh Nicky!"

There was no time to ask where she'd been, nor even of Macartney. I think the unsuitable thing I said was "Marcia!"

For I heard Marcia jump and fall over Paulette's open trunk, before she was out

Digitized by Google

her door like one of the wolves Macartney was so fond of. I didn't think she saw us, but she did see Collins. The thing that cut her off was his rush out of somewhere. I heard her scream with furious terror; heard Paulette's door bang on her; and Collins was beside me with a rifle and some dunnage I scarcely saw in the sudden dark of the passage from that banged door.

"Run," said he through his teeth. "Gim-me that stuff! Run!" He stuffed the snow-shoes under the arm that held the rifle. "No, not that way! This way."

He cut across the clearing in the opposite direction from the hole that led to his underground den, and it was time. Half of Macartney's men were tearing through the passage to Marcia's screams, and the rest pouring out of the kitchen door. In the storm we could only hear them.

I was carrying Paulette like a baby, and with her head against me I could not see her face. All I could see was swirling, stinging snow in my eyes, and the sudden dark of the bush we brought up in. I kept along the edge of it, circling the clearing, and all but fell over the edge of Collins's jutting rock. And this time I thanked God for the furious snow. In ten minutes there would be no sign of our tracks from the front door to the hole the rock shielded, and there was no earthly chance of Macartney's men pick-ing them up before we were safe.

It felt like years before the three of us were inside the curtain of juniper, swarm-ing up the smooth rock face, but Collins ob-served contrarily that he'd never done it so quick. He led the way up to the passage angle where he had pinched out his light; put down the snowshoes and the rifle; laid something else on the ground with remark-able caution; and walked on some feet be-fore he lit his candle.

"Better travel light and get home. Dunn and I'll come back presently and bring up the dunnage," he observed as blandly as if the three of us had been for an evening stroll; and suddenly laughed as he saw me glance at his stockinged feet. "By golly! I've left my boots in the shack, and I have-n't any others—but it was worth a pair of boots! I stubbed my toe on Miss Wilbra-ham's little revolver she must have dropped on the passage floor, and I've got it. Also, let alone her lost toy-dog gun, I got all her ammunition and her rifle, while she was grabbling in Miss Paulette's trunk. 'Taffy went to my house, thought I was asleep. I went to Taffy's house, and stole a side of beef,' as I learned when I was young. Come on, Stretton; I bet we'll be top-sides with Macartney-Hutton yet!"

"He's out, looking for me," but Paulette's sentence broke in a gasp. "Why, it's Col-lins!" She stared incredulously in the can-dle light.

"Just that," imperturbably, "Stretton can tell you all about me presently, Miss Paulette. For now I imagine you'd sooner see a fire and something to eat. Put her in between us, Stretton, Indian file, and we'll take her down."

Women are queer things. Tatiana Paul-ina Valenka had tramped the bush most of the day before looking for a dead man, had found him—a sight no girl should have looked on—had run for more than her life with me, and been through God knew what since; and she walked down that unknown, dark passage with Collins and me as if nothing had ever happened to her. She greeted Dunn, too; and then, as he and Collins disappeared to fetch our snow-shoes and rifle, went straight to pieces where she-and I stood by their fire.

"Oh, oh, oh! I thought you were dead! I saw them get you. I can't believe—can't believe—" she flung out in jerks, as if she fought for her very breath, and suddenly dropped flat on Dunn's old blanket. "Oh Nicky," she moaned, "don't let me faint now—Nicky!"

There was something in her voice, I don't know, but it made me dizzy with sheer, clear joy. She had said my name as if I were the one man in the world for her, as if I had risen from the dead. But I dared not say so. I knew better than even to lift her head where she lay with closed eyes on Dunn's blanket, but I got Collins's old tin cup to her lips somehow, and made her drink his strong coffee till it set her blood running, as it had set mine.

After a minute she sat up dizzily, but she pushed away my bread and meat.

"Presently—I'd be sick now," she whis-pered. "How did you get out of Thomp-son's stope? And where—I can't under-stand, I mean, about Collins and Dunn!"

"They got me out," said I, and explained about them.

But there was no particular surprise on Paulette's face. She never made an earthly comment, either, when I told her they'd

Digitized by Google

always known all about her and Hutton, except—

"I never thought that they were dead; I told you that. I'd an idea, too, that Charliet didn't think so either."

I had one arm round her by that time, feeding her with my other hand like a child, with bits of bread soaked in coffee. If I had any thoughts they were only fear she might move from me as soon as she really came to herself. But Charliet's name brought me back from what was next door to heaven.

"Charliet," said I blankly. "Where in the world is he? D'ye mean he hadn't told you about Collins and Dunn? Why, he was to bring you to them, here—hours ago!"

"Charliet was? But——"

Suddenly, beyond belief, my dream-girl turned and clung to me. God knows I knelt like a statue. I was afraid to stir. It was Dudley she loved; I was only a man who was strong and a friend.

"Oh, Nicky, you don't know," she cried, "you don't know! You and I ran straight into some of Dick Hutton's men when we raced out of the shack; and you threw me—just picked me up like a puppy and threw me—out of their way into the deep snow. I heard them get you, but I was half smothered; I couldn't even see nor speak. But I heard Dick shout from somewhere to 'chuck Stretton into Thompson's old stope!' I thought they'd killed you; that it was another man I'd let be—murdered!"

She caught her breath as if something stabbed her, and I know it stabbed me to think I was just "another man" to her. But I knelt steady. I had been a fool to think it was I she cared for, personally, and whether she did or not she needed my arm.

"Well?" I asked. "Next?"

"I was scrambling out of the snow," I felt her shiver against me, "only before I could stand up Charliet raced up from somewhere, and shoved me back into the drift again. He said Dick was looking for me; to lie still, while he got him away; then to race for the shack and hide, just outside the front door, till he came for me—and Dick ran down on the two of us, with a lantern. He'd have fallen over me, if Charliet hadn't stopped him by yelling I'd made for the bush. I think he grabbed the lantern—anyhow, they both tore off. I got to the shack, but—oh Nicky, I couldn't wait there! I——"

"Well?" It seemed to be the only word in my brain.

"I went down to Thompson's stope. But I was too late. The men had walled you in with rocks, and I couldn't move them. I tried." (I thought she must hear the leap my heart gave. I know I shut my jaws to keep my tongue between my teeth at the thought of her trying to dig her way in to me, the only friend she had in the world but a French-Canadian cook!) "I—oh, I thought if I could find Charliet we might do something! I went to look for him, and I found you—oh, I found you!"

Her arms were still on my shoulders where I knelt by her, but suddenly her voice came low and anxious:

"What do you suppose became of Charliet? He's faithful. We can't leave him, for Dick to turn on when he can't find me!"

I was not thinking of Charliet. I couldn't honestly care what became of him, with my dream-girl in my arms. I may as well tell the truth—I forgot Dudley. I don't know what mad words would have come out of me if Paulette had not pushed me away abruptly. What was left of her coffee upset; I got to my feet with the empty cup in my hand, just as Collins and Dunn and their candle appeared round the boulder.

I remembered long afterward that I had never answered Paulette one single word about myself, Thompson's stope, anything. But then all I did was to stare at something Collins carried carefully in his two hands.

"What's that?" I said, just to say something.

"Some new kind of high explosive Wilbraham got to try, and never did," Collins returned casually. "Saw it in his office tonight, and thought it was better with us than Macartney. Don't know just how it works, so I'm treating it gingerly."

He moved on into the darkness of his own tunnel and came back empty-handed.

"What are you going to do—first?" he inquired calmly.

I took a look at Paulette. Whether it was from Collins's casual mention of Dudley's name or not, she was ghastly. Who she was looking at I don't know; but it wasn't me.

"Sleep," said I grimly. "Two of us need it, if you and Dunn don't. Macartney can't get us tonight." I was none too sure. Charliet might get rattled any minute and

Digitized by Google

give us away. Only there was no good in sticking at trifles.

But Collins was an astute devil.

"He won't," he rejoined as calmly as if I had spoken of Charliet. "He won't get hurt either, you can bank on that. Make up that fire, Dunn, and we'll give Miss Paulette the blankets."

We did, where she lay at one side; and the three men of us dropped like dogs in a row in front of the fire. I was next Paulette, with the space of a foot or so between us. I had not known how dead weary I was till I stretched out flat.

Collins and Dunn may have slept, I don't know, but Paulette did as soon as she got her head down. I thought I lay and watched the fire, but I must have slept too. For I awoke with my heart drumming as if I'd heard the trump for the last judgment, and Paulette's hand in mine. I must have flung my arm out till I touched her, and her little fingers were tight round my hard, dirty hand, clinging to it. I lay in heaven, in the dark of a frowsy cave we might be hunted out of any minute, with the dying glow of the fire in my eyes and my dream-girl's hand in mine. And suddenly, like a blow, I heard her whisper in her sleep:

"Dudley! Oh, dear Dudley!"

I was only Nicky Stretton, and a fool. I lay in the dark with a heart like a stone, and a girl's warm, clinging hand in mine.

XVII

HIGH EXPLOSIVE

THERE was nothing to tell of any hand-clasp when I awoke in the morning. Paulette lay in her blankets with her back to me, as if she had lain so all night; Dunn was making up the fire; Collins was absent, till he appeared out of his tunnel where he had put Dudley's high explosive the night before, and nodded to me.

None of us spoke. We were all that chilly sort of stiff you get after sleeping with your clothes on.

As we ate our breakfast I took one glance at Paulette, and looked away again. She was absolutely white, almost stunned-looking, and her eyes would not meet mine. I had an intuition she had waked in the night after I slept and discovered what she had been doing; but if she were ashamed there was no need. God knows I would not have reminded her of the thing. I knew the dark hollows under her eyes and the tears in them were for Dudley, not for me. But I had to take care of her somehow, and Collins glanced at me as I thought it.

"I suppose you realize Charliet's our only line of communication, and that he and all the La Chance guns are in the hands of the enemy," he observed dryly. "What do you think of doing about it?"

"Get Charliet, all the guns and ammunition he can steal, hold this place, and harry Macartney," I supposed. "What do you think?"

I had turned to Paulette, but she only shook her head with—

"I don't know, Mr. Stretton!"

I had time to decide she had only called me Nicky by mistake six hours ago, before Collins disagreed with me flatly.

"Stay here? Not much! Won't work—Macartney'd drop on us! Oh, I know he won't be able to find our real entrance to this place unless Charliet gives us away, and I'm not worrying about that. But after he realizes Miss Valenka has vanished, and when Charliet and most of his guns vanish too, and his men begin to get picked off one by one, how long do you suppose it will be before Macartney connects the three things and smells a rat? He'll sense Charliet and a girl can't be fighting him alone. For all we know he'll guess you must have got out of Thompson's stope somehow and dig away his rock fence to see! And I imagine we'd look well in here if he did."

"It's just what we would look," said I. "You ass, Collins, with Macartney ignorant of the real way in on us, and he and his gang digging open Thompson's tunnel against the daylight with you and me and Dunn in the dark on that shelf in Thompson's stope we came in here by, we'd have the drop on the lot. Except—Marcia!"

Her name jerked out of me. We would have to count Marcia in with Macartney's gang; and, remembering she had known me all her life, it made me smart.

"Oh, Miss Wilbraham—I should let her rip," Collins returned callously. "Listen, Stretton. What you say's all very well, only we can't count on holding this place when we're discovered, while it's a matter of if Charliet can get guns! Miss Marcia's rifle and her toy popgun aren't going to save us, and I doubt if Charliet can really swipe any more. What I say is, let's cut

Digitized by Google

some horses out of the stable after dark, all four of us clear out on them to Caraquet, and set the sheriff and his men after Macartney. Unless—" he turned boldly to Paulette—"you don't want that, Miss Valenka?"

But if she had been going to answer, which I don't think she was, I cut her off:

"We can't let Marcia rip—don't talk nonsense, Collins! She's Dudley's sister, if she and Macartney are a firm. We can't clear out and leave her with a man like that!"

"We can't take her to Caraquet," Collins argued with some point. "You own she doesn't know anything about Macartney's wolf-dope; you haven't got any witnesses to prove he tried it on your wagon, nor to set the wolves on Dudley. Miss Wilbraham would just up and swear your whole story was a lie, and all Caraquet would believe her! Nobody alive ever heard of such a thing as wolf-dope."

"That's just where you're wrong!" I remembered the boy I'd left cached at Skunk's Misery—and something else that had been in my head ever since wolves and the smell of a Skunk's Misery bottle seemed to go together. "Two Frenchmen were run in for using wolf-dope in Quebec province last Winter, for I've got an account of their trial somewhere that I cut out of an Ottawa paper. And as for a witness, I've got a boy secreted at Skunk's Misery who can prove Macartney made the same stuff there. The only thing we might get stuck on with the sheriff is the reason for all the murders he's done, with and without it."

"I guess Miss Valenka knows the reason all right."

Collins spoke as coolly as if she were not there, and it may have been the wisest thing to do, for, though she flushed sharply, she said nothing. He went on with exactly what she had said herself:

"But after Hutton came here to get her, he saw he'd be a fool not to grab the La Chance mine too, and, unless we can stop him, you bet he and his gang have grabbed it! They've disposed of Thompson, of all your own men who might have stood by you, of Wilbraham," categorically. "They think they've disposed of Dunn and me, and buried you alive, and—except for having lost Miss Valenka—Macartney's made his game. Nobody'll know there's anything wrong at the mine till the Spring, because there's no one interested enough to ask questions till Wilbraham's bank payments have stopped long enough to look queer. And by that time Macartney and his gang will be gone, and the cream of Wilbraham's gold with them.

"As for us, we can't fight him by hiding in this burrow with Miss Paulette, and without any guns, even if he doesn't end by nosing out Dunn's and my gold, as well as Wilbraham's. Why, we depend only on Charliet for our food, let alone everything else, and, for all we know, Charliet may have squeaked on us by this time. I say again, let's get a sheriff and posse at Caraquet and come back here and get Macartney! We could do it, if we took Miss Paulette and hit the trail tonight."

"And Macartney'd get us, if we tried it!" I had thrashed all that out in my head before, while I was tying up Macartney with Charliet's clothes-line. "We'd be stopped by his picket at the Halfway, if ever we got to the Halfway, for the Caraquet road's likely drifted solid—and you don't make time digging out smothering horses. No. We'll fight Macartney where we are! And the way to do it is with Charliet and guns."

"If you'll tell me how we're to connect with either." Collins was grim. "It's a mighty dangerous thing calling up Charliet on number one Wolf, with the whole of La Chance crawling with Macartney and his gang hunting for Miss Paulette. But we can go up to my back door and try it."

"Oh don't," Paulette burst out wildly, "I'm afraid! I mean I know we must find out if Charliet's all right, but you mayn't get him—and you'll give yourselves away!"

It was almost the first time she had spoken, and it was more to Collins than to me, but I got up.

"We'll get Charliet all right," I began, and Collins gripped me.

"I dunno," he drawled. "It strikes me some one's going to get us, first!"

He snapped out our candle, which was senseless, since Dunn's red-hot fire showed us up plain as day, and all four of us stood paralyzed. Somebody, running, slipping with a hideous clatter of stones, was coming down the long passage Collins called his back door.

"Macartney," said I, "and Charliet's given us away!"

And with the words in my mouth I had Paulette round the waist and out of sight, behind the boulder that separated Collins's

Digitized by Google

cave from his tunnel and the pierced wall of Thompson's stope. Macartney might be a devil, but there was no doubt the man was brave to come like that for a girl, through the dark bowels of the earth where Charliet must have warned him Dunn and Collins would be lurking. Only he had not got Paulette yet, and he would find three men to face, before he even saw her.

I stooped over her in the dark tunnel, where just a knife-edge of the cave firelight cut over the boulder's top.

"Keep still, Paulette; and for God's sake don't move and kick Collins's devilish explosive he's got stuck in here somewhere," I said, exactly as if I were steady. Which I was not, because it was my unlooked-for, Heaven-sent chance to get square with Macartney.

I sprang round the boulder to do it, and saw Collins strike up the barrel of Marcia's rifle from Dunn's stretched left arm.

"Don't shoot," he yelled. "You fool, it's Charliet!"

I STOOD dead still. It was Charliet, but a Charliet I had never seen. His French-Canadian face was tallow-white, as he tore into the cave grinning like a dog with rage and excitement. He brushed Dunn and Collins aside like flies and grabbed my arm.

"Come out," he panted, "*Sacré* bring Mademoiselle Paulette and come out! It is that Marcia. She sees you in the shack last night; sees you alive and out of Thompson's stope where they buried you, carrying Mademoiselle away! She tells Macartney this morning, when he and I get in after hunting for Mademoiselle all night—praying, me, that we might not find her, and that you might.

"Oh, I tell you I was crazy—dog-crazy! I can not get away from Macartney. I think her dead in the snow without me, till first thing this morning we come in and that she-devil tells Macartney Stretton takes Mademoiselle away! Not till now, till all are out of the house, do I have the chance to come and warn you. They—that Marcia, Macartney, all of the men—start now to dig you out of Thompson's stope they put you in. They think they left some hole you crawl out of in the snow and dark; that you come for Mademoiselle and take her back into!

"I could not get you even one small cartridge to hold this place, and Macartney is clever. He will be in here, with all his guns, all his men, and then *quoi faire?* Come now, all of you, while there is the one chance to come unseen, and get on horses, and go away. Ah—" the man's fierce voice broke, ran up imploringly—"I beg you, Mademoiselle, like I would beg the blessed Virgin, to make them come! Before Macartney—or that Marcia—finds you!"

I jumped round and saw Paulette in the cave. I had left her safe in Collins's tunnel; and there she stood, come out into plain view at the sound of Charliet's voice. But she was not looking at him, nor me, nor any of us. Her eyes stared sword-blue at the hole where Charliet had rushed in from Collins's secret passage. I think all I realized of her face was her eyes. I turned, galvanized, to what she stared at—and saw.

Marcia Wilbraham was standing in the entrance from the long passage, behind us all, except Paulette; meeting Paulette's eyes with her small bright brown ones, her lips wide in her ugly gum-showing smile. I knew, of course, that she had picked up Charliet's track in the snow from his kitchen door to Collins's juniper-covered entrance, had followed straight on his heels down the dark passage, instead of going with Macartney to dig me out of Thompson's stope; that in one second she would turn and run back again, to show Macartney Collins's back door.

My jump was late. It was Dunn who saved us. He sprang matter-of-factly, like a bloodhound, and pulled Marcia down. She was as strong as a man, pretty nearly. She fought fiercely till she heard the boy laugh. That cowed her, in some queer way. I heard Dunn say:

"You'd better stay here a while, Miss Wilbraham. It's safer—than with Macartney."

I saw Charliet run to help him, and the two of them placidly tie and gag Marcia Wilbraham with anything they could take off themselves. It was with a vivid impression of Charliet's none too clean neck-handkerchief playing a large part in Marcia's toilette that Collins and I jumped, with one accord, to Paulette. I don't know what he said to her. I saw her nod. I said:

"We're done for, if Macartney gets in on us through Thompson's stope and finds this place. He'll just send half his men to scout round for the other entrance that

Digitized by Google

they'll find from Charliet's and Marcia's tracks, and get at us both ways. You stay here with Charliet, while Collins and I meet Macartney in Thompson's stope. When—if you hear we can't best him, run—with Charliet! Dunn'll look after Marcia."

She gave me a stunned sort of look, as if I were deserting her, as if I didn't care. I would have snatched her in my arms and kissed her, Dudley or no Dudley lying dead in the bush, but I had no time. Collins had me by the elbow, his fierce drawl close to my half-comprehending ear.

We'd no guns but Marcia's popgun and her rifle; two of us, even on the shelf in Thompson's stope, would do little good with those against all Macartney's men crowding into the stope, and giving us a volley the second our fire from the shelf drew theirs. We might pick off a dozen of them before our cartridges gave out. But there was no sense in that business. We would have to try.

But here I came alive to Collins's voice.

"That high explosive," he was saying. "It's a filthy trick, but God knows they deserve it! If we blow them back far enough at the very entrance of the tunnel, they may never come on again to get in."

I daresay I'd have recoiled in cold blood; but my blood ran hot that morning. I did think, though, hard. I said:

"Can't do it! No fuse."

"Heaps—Dunn's and mine!" I heard Collins grabbling for it somewhere in the dark of the tunnel.

Behind me somebody lit a candle; who, I never looked to see. In the light of it I saw Collins pick up his bundle of blasting powder, and warned him sharply:

"Look out with that stuff! We don't know it—it may work any way. If it bursts up in the air the stope roof'll be down on us. It may fire back, too. And we'd be hit behind the point of burst."

"We won't be," said Collins between his teeth. "I'll burst it out the tunnel, and blow Macartney's gang to rags!"

But that lighted candle at my back had shown me other than explosive—the silly, pointless snow-shoes I had lugged from my own room in the shack. My conscious mind knew what my subconscious mind had wanted them for now, like a mill where some one has turned on the current. I swore out loud:

"By gad, Collins, listen! If we don't smash Macartney, and he gets in on us, he'll get Paulette! I've got to stop that, somehow. Macartney doesn't know she's here yet; Marcia only guessed it. Supposing he were to see only me, alone in Thompson's stope, he might never know she was here too."

"Dunno what you mean," Collins snapped. And I snapped back:

"I mean that if we blow a clean hole at the tunnel entrance, and I burst out of it and run, I can get the whole gang after me—and make time for you and Charliet to get Paulette away somewhere, by the back door."

"But—" Collins checked where he swarmed up into Thompson's stope—"where'll you go? You can't, Stretton! It's death."

"It's sense," said I. "As for where I'll go, Lac Tremblant'll do for me—and I bet it will finish any man of Macartney's who tries to come after me! Get through into that stope with your fuse, man; I'll hand you the blasting stuff. Got it? All right! Here you, gimme that candle."

I turned and took it—out of Paulette's hand. I gasped, taken aback all standing, before I lied:

"It's all right, Paulette. I'll be back in a minute."

And, though I knew she must have heard what I was going to do, I had no better sense than to stoop before the girl's blank eyes and snatch up my two pairs of snow-shoes that had been lying beside the explosive I'd just passed up to Collins, before I swarmed up through the hole into Thompson's stope, on to the shelf from whence I had first dropped into Collins's cave.

Collins was down in Thompson's tunnel already, laying his fuse with deadly skill. Already, too, we could hear Macartney's men outside, levering away the boulders that had plugged up the tunnel entrance where I was to starve and die. Collins placed the stuff I carried down to him. I said:

"My God! you can't use all that. The whole stope'll be down on us!"

And he answered: "No; I've done it right."

That was every word we uttered till we were back on our high shelf, with a lit fuse left behind us in the stope. The fuse burned smooth as a dream, and Collins

Digitized by Google

nudged me with fierce satisfaction. But I was suddenly dead-sick with horror. Not at the thing we were doing—if it were devil's work we had been driven to be devils—but at the knowledge that Paulette was standing within reach of my feet that were through the stope wall and hanging down into Collins's tunnel—that tunnel every bone in me knew was amateur, unsafe, a death-trap.

The shock of a big explosion in Thompson's stope might well bring its roof down on Paulette, standing alone in it, waiting, trusting to me for safety. I turned my head and yelled at her as a man yells at a dog, or his dearest, when he is sick with fear for her:

"Get back out of that into the cave. *Run!*"

I heard her jump; heard her—but thought stopped in me. With one unwritable, life-checking shock the whole earth, the very globe, seemed to have blown to pieces around me. The flash and roar was like a thousand howitzers in my very face; the solid rock shelf I was on leapt under me; and behind me the whole of Collins's tunnel collapsed with a grinding roar.

I heard Collins gasp, "My God!" heard the rocks and gravel in the stope before me settling with an indescribable, threatening noise, between thunder and breaking china, and all I thought of was that I'd warned my dream-girl in time, that she'd answered me, that she was back in Collins's cave, and safe. Till, suddenly to eyes that had been too dazzled and seared to see it clearing, the smoke before me cleared, the choking fumes lessened, and I saw.

Saw, straight in front of me, where a tunnel had been and was no longer, a clean hole like a barn door where Thompson's tunnel entrance had been but two-men wide; saw out, into furious, crimson color that turned slowly, as my sight grew normal, into the golden, dazzling glory of Winter sun on snow.

There was silence outside in the sun, all but some yells and moaning. How much damage we'd done I couldn't see; nor where Macartney's men were, dead or alive. But now, while they were paralyzed with shock and surprise, now was my time to get through them. I lowered myself gingerly to the rubbish-heap that had been the smooth floor of Thompson's stope; edged in cover to the tunnel entrance; slipped my feet in the toe and heel straps of the snow-shoes I'd held tight against me through all the unspeakable, hellish uproar of rending rock, and sprang—sprang out into the sunlight, out on the clear snow, past wounded men, reeling men, dying men, and raced as I never put foot to ground before nor since, for Lac Tremblant, glittering flat and snow-covered in front of me; that Lac Tremblant I had thought of subconsciously when I carried snow-shoes into Collins's cave.

In the beginning of this story I said what Lac Tremblant was like. It was a lake that was no lake; that should have been our waterway out of the bush instead of miles of expensive road, and was no more practicable than a rope ladder to the stars. For the depth of Lac Tremblant, or its fairway, were two things no man could count on. It would fall in a night to shallows a child might wade through, among bristling rocks no one had ever guessed at, and rise in a morning to the top of the spruce scrub on its banks, a sweet spread of water, with never a rock to be seen.

What hidden spring fed it was a mystery. But in the bitterest Winter it was never frozen further than to surging masses of frail ice that would not let a canoe push through them, nor yet support the weight of a man. It was on that frail ice, that some people call lolly, that I meant to run for my life now, trusting to the resistance of the two feet of snow that lay on the lake in the mysterious way snow does lie on lolly, and to the snow-shoes on my feet. And as I slithered on to the soft snow of the lake, from the crackling, breaking shell-ice on the La Chance shore, I knew I had done well.

Some, a good many, of Macartney's men were killed or half killed by our deadly blast, but not all. He had been more cautious than I guessed. I saw the rest of his gang bunched some hundred feet from the smashed-out tunnel; saw Macartney too, standing with them. But all I cared for was that he should see me, come out after me on the crust of snow and lolly over Lac Tremblant—that would never carry him without the snow-shoes he did not have—and give Paulette her chance to get away. I yelled at him and skimmed out over the trembling lake like a bird.

Neither Macartney nor his men stirred in that one flying glance I had dared take

Digitized by Google

at them. But sheer tumult came out of them now. Then shots that missed me, and a sudden howled order from Macartney I dared not turn my head or break my stride to understand. The giving surface under me was bearing, but a quarter second's pause would have let me through. There was no sense in zigzagging. Once I was clear I ran as straight as I dared for the other shore, five miles away; but suddenly I realized I was not clear—I was followed.

Somebody else on snow-shoes had shot out of Thompson's tunnel, over the crackling shore-ice on to the snow and frail; was up to me, close behind me.

"Run, Nicky," shrieked Paulette's voice, "run!"

I slewed my head round and saw her running behind me.

XVIII

LAC TREMBLANT

Across the ice that never froze,
The snow that never bore,
My love ran out to follow me,
To follow to the shore.
The Day the World Went Mad.

IT MAY be true that I swore aloud. But what I meant by it was more like praying. Over me was the blue Winter sky and the gold sun, under me the treacherous spread of the lake that was no lake, that one misstep might send me through to God knew what hideous depth of unfrozen water, or bare, bone-shattering stone; behind me were Macartney and Macartney's men; and close up to me, nearer every second, my Paulette, my dream-girl who had never been mine.

There was nothing to do for both of us but to keep on crossing Lac Tremblant. Missteps might be death, but turning back was worse, for her, anyway. I yelled:

"Keep wide! Get abreast of me! Don't go anywhere you don't see me go. But keep wide!" Because what held one of us would never hold two, and behind me, running in my tracks—well, even a light girl would not run long.

Paulette only screamed:

"Yes. Keep on! They're coming!"

She may have needed her breath, I don't know, but she didn't run like it. She ran like a deer, with my own flat, heel-dragging stride on the snow-shoes I had not thought she knew how to use.

One more shot came after us. I yelled again to her to keep wide, and heard her sheer off a little to obey me, but she still ran behind. God knows I didn't realize till afterward that it was to keep Macartney from shooting me. I didn't even wonder why Collins and Dunn weren't firing into the brown of Macartney's men with Marcia's rifle and popgun. I was too busy watching the snow surfaces in front of me.

There was a difference in them. I can't explain what, but a difference between where there was water to buoy the snow, and what lay on shell-ice. The open black holes where there was nothing at all, any one could see, and I didn't worry over them. I only knew we must run over water, or the light stuff under us would let us through.

I kept moving my hand in infinitesimal signals to Paulette, and God knows she was quick at understanding. My heart was in my mouth for her, but she never made a mistake, nor a stumble where a stumble would have meant the end. She called to me suddenly, something that sounded like, "They're coming!"

I turned my head and saw out of the tail of my eye, like a man sees when he's riding a race. They were coming—Macartney's men, and, I thought, Macartney—but I knew better than to look long enough to make sure. His men, anyhow, had raced out on the lake as we had raced, and there was no need to watch what became of them. Their floundering, dying screams came to us, as they sank in their heavy boots through snow and frail ice, to depths they would never get out of.

I might have been sick anywhere else. I was fierce with joy out there on Lac Tremblant, running with a girl over the thin crust that death lurked under to snatch at us, as it had snatched at Macartney's men. Neither of us spoke. I was thinking too hard.

I could have run forever, as we were running, but Paulette was just a girl. What of Paulette if she slackened with weariness, if I led her wrong by six inches, or missed a single threatening sign on the stuff we fled over?

If I had been sure Macartney was drowned I might have taken her back to La Chance; but I was not sure. And, Macartney or no Macartney, the track I had led

Digitized by Google

her out on the lake by was the only one I would have dared trust to return on, and it was all lumps of snowy lolly and blue water, where Macartney's men had broken through.

I looked ahead of me with my mind running like a mill. We had done about half the five-mile crossing; we might do the rest if we could stop and breathe for ten minutes, for five, even for two. Only, in all the width of the lake that lay like cake icing in front of us, there was not one place where we could dare to stand. The water under us was higher than I had ever known it. Not one single dagger-toothed rock showed out of it as they had shown when I crossed it in a canoe the night before it froze to the thick slush that was all it ever froze to; there was not a single place.

But suddenly, out of the back of my memory, something came to me. There was one place in Lac Tremblant where, high water or low, a man might always stand, if I could hit it in the smothering, featureless snow.

"The island," I gasped out loud.

Because there was one, a high, narrow island without even a bush on it, rising gradually, not precipitately like the rest of the rocks in Lac Tremblant, out of the uncertain water. But for half an hour I thought it might as well be non-existent. Stare as I might, I could see no sign of it, and suddenly I all but fell with blessed shock. I was on it, on the tail end of it with solid ground under my feet; solid ground, and safety, breath, and rest. I yelled to Paulette: "Jump to me!" and she jumped.

That was all there was to it, except a man and a girl, panting, staggering, clinging together, till sense came to them and they dropped flat in the snow.

I said sense, but I don't know that I had any. I lay there, staring at Paulette and her long bronze hair that had come down as she ran, till it was like a mantle over her and the snow round her. I had never thought women had hair like that. I let out—

"Oh, my God, Paulette, why did you come?"

I may have sounded angry; I was, as a man always is angry when he has dragged a woman into his danger. Paulette panted without looking at me:

"I—had to! The tunnel caved in!"

"I told you to get out of it!"

I sat up where I had flung myself down, and stared at her. She sat up too, both of us crimson-faced and disheveled. But neither of us thought of that. I stormed like a fool:

"What possessed you to stay in the tunnel—or to follow me? I told you to jump for the cave!"

"Well, I didn't." Paulette stiffened as if she froze. "I hadn't time. I would have had to cross the tunnel. And I hadn't time to do anything but jump to you and Collins before your stuff blew up. I'd just got on your shelf when it went off, and it stunned me till I had only sense enough left to lie still and hold on. But afterward, when I saw what you were going to do, I put on the snow-shoes you'd left by the tunnel entrance and came after you. I'm sorry I did, now."

"But Collins—" I looked blankly across the two miles of quivering death-trap we still had to cross before we gained what safety there might be in the Halfway shore, and the neighborhood of Macartney's picket, and my thoughts were not of Collins—"why in Heaven's name didn't Collins have sense enough to lug you back into his cave with him and Charliet, instead of letting you take a chance like this?"

"Collins couldn't get back himself," Paulette retorted as if I were unbearably stupid. "Nobody could get back! I told you the tunnel caved in, till it was solid between us and the others. Collins saw I had to follow you. Dick would have come to hunt Thompson's stope for me, in two more minutes, and we had no guns to stand him off. You and Collins left them in the tunnel."

It was just what we had done, and I wasted good time remembering it, guiltily. Paulette stood up and twisted back her streaming cloud of hair.

"So, as I had to come with you," she resumed without looking at me, "don't you think we'd better get on? If you're waiting for me to rest, you needn't."

I wasn't, altogether. I stared back over the perilous way we had come. There was no black speck of any one following us on its treacherous face; no sound of shots; no anything from the shore we had left.

"Where do you suppose Macartney is?" I asked involuntarily.

"Dead," her voice was almost indifferent,

Digitized by Google

but she shivered, "or he'd have gone on shooting at us."

I nodded, but I would have felt easier if I had really thought so. Somehow I didn't, I don't know why. I know nothing would have induced me to take Paulette back to La Chance, even if the trodden lolly would have borne us again. I had a pang about Collins, left alone there; but Collins could take care of himself, and Paulette's shiver had reminded me we should freeze to death if we loitered where we were. I pointed to the snowy lake between us and the Halfway shore.

"Can you do two more miles of running over that?"

"Yes," she glanced down at her slim, trained body rather superbly. "Only—there's no one following us. Have we got to be quite so quick?"

"Quicker! We don't know about Macartney. If he's alive he has a stable full of horses, and he knows where we're running to. He may try to cut us off."

I half lied. He could not cut us off, since horses would be no use to him in the heavy snow, and on foot it would take him two days to go round Lac Tremblant to the Halfway, where crossing the lolly could bring us in two hours. But I had no mind to air my real reason for speed.

I should have known Paulette was too shrewd for me.

"I'm a fool—Lac Tremblant never bears, of course," she said quite quietly. "Go on, Mr. Stretton. Only don't stop if anything goes wrong with me!"

"Nothing will go wrong," said I, just as if I believed it.

If she had called me Nicky, as she had done by mistake the night before when she slept with her hand clasping mine, if she'd even looked at me, I must have burst out that I loved her, past life and death, and out to the world to come. But it was no time to force love-making on a girl who had seen the man she meant to marry lie dead before her eyes.

If she turned shaky, or cried, I could never save her. For the bit of lake in front of us was ten times worse than what we'd crossed. I knew that when I tightened up the snow-shoe thongs silently, and led my dream-girl out on it. I would have given half my life for a rope, like people have on glaciers. But I had no rope, and each of us would have to run or sink, alone. I meant, of course—but that's no matter.

I got Paulette off the island and, inch by inch, feeling my way, back to the channel where buoyant water, at least, lay under us. It twisted and turned like a corkscrew, but I dared not leave it.

Once I cautioned Paulette never to try a short cut, just to keep abreast of me, and twice my heart was in my mouth at a hollow, instant-long clatter under our shoes. But we got on over the stuff somehow, leaving holes of blue water in our tracks, with great gobbets of snow floating in them. The shore lay close in front of us, with a hard distinct edge of shell-ice showing where the water stopped.

I was just going to call out that in ten feet more we'd be safe over the lolly, when *smash!* both of us went through! I thought I fell a mile before I hit the water that was going to drown us; hit it knees first, just as I'd gone through, and I sprawled in icy slush that rose no higher than my waist. I was in a sort of pocket between two rocks that were holding up the lolly; there was an avalanche of caving snow and ice all round me; but I was not drowned nor likely to be.

Yet I barely thought of it. For I could not see Paulette. Suddenly, past belief, I heard her scream—

"Nicky!"

I fought to the sound of her voice, blindly; wormed between my screening rocks, and gasped as I stood up. She was not in water at all. She had dropped through shell-ice to bare ground, a long ledge of bare ground that led straight to the Halfway shore; roofed, high above my head as I stood, with shell-ice and lolly that filtered a silver-green light.

My dream-girl lay there, in her little blue sweater, with the wind knocked out of her, and that was all. I kicked off my snow-shoes that were not even broken, and carried her under the ice roof to the Halfway shore. I may have thanked God aloud—I don't know. Only I carried her, with my face close to hers, and the slush and snow off her falling over me, till the ice arcade ended on the blessed shore.

I had just sense enough to drop her in the blinding daylight, and drop myself beside her. I couldn't speak from dead-cold fear, now that I had saved her, of what it would have been if I had not. For two gasping minutes we just lay there

Digitized by Google

Paulette spoke first, sobbingly:

"I'm so dreadfully sorry—I've been such a trouble! But I couldn't do anything but come, and—I forgot you couldn't want me!"

I sat up and saw her sitting beside me on a cold, bare, wind-swept rock that was all the refuge I had to offer her. Half a mile farther on were food and shelter in the Halfway shack I'd built myself; and it might as well have been in heaven, for with Macartney's men cached in it I naturally could not take her there.

Behind that, twenty-seven miles off, was Caraquet. But even a girl with a trained body like Paulette's could never make twenty-seven miles on top of all we'd done.

"It's no question of wanting you!" I exclaimed angrily. "It's that I don't know what to do. But want you! When do you suppose I haven't wanted you, ever since the night I first saw you by Dudley's fire? What do you suppose I'd ever have been in this game for, if I hadn't wanted just you, in all this world? My heart of hearts, don't you know I love you?"

I lost my head, or I never would have said it, for I saw her flinch. That brought me back to myself in the snow and desolation round us that stood for God's world, as nothing else would have done. I burst out in shame:

"Oh, for God's sake, forgive me! I never meant to let that out. I know you never cared a hang for me; that you were going to marry Dudley, if he hadn't been killed!"

For one solid minute Paulette never opened her mouth. She sat like a colored statue, with rose-crimson cheeks and gold-bronze hair under the white January sun. Her eyes were so dark in her face that they looked like blue-black ink.

"I—I never was engaged to Dudley," she gasped at last, more as if it jerked out of her than voluntarily. "I didn't think it was any business of yours, but I never was. We—Dudley and I—only said so, because it seemed the simplest way to manage Marcia when Dudley brought me here to get me out of that emerald business. He was good to me, if ever a man was good to a girl he was only sorry for. I can't forget what brought him to his death. I'm sick with sorrow for him—but I never was going to marry Dudley! He didn't even want me to. He—oh, Nicky!"

Because I couldn't stand it—I'd seen her eyes—I had both her hands in mine. I think I was telling her over and over how I'd always loved her; how I'd stood out of Dudley's way; that I didn't expect, of course, that she could care about an Indian-faced fool like me, when, suddenly, I knew. Like roses and silver trumpets out there in the homeless snow, I knew! Again all Paulette said was:

"Oh, Nicky!"

But the two of us were in each other's arms.

I don't know how long we clung nor what we said, till I lifted my Indian-dark head from her gold one and spoke abruptly out of Paradise.

"By gad! I have it!"

"Have what?" Paulette gasped. "Oh, you certainly have most of my hair. It's all wound up in your coat buttons, if you mean that!"

I didn't.

"I meant I knew where we could go, and that's Skunk's Misery." I harked back soberly; I remembered the boy I had left there with a fire and shelter, anyhow, if not food.

"But you said it was an awful place!"

"So it is, when you have anywhere else to go. But we can't try the Halfway, with Macartney's men in it, and neither of us could make Caraquet tonight. We've got to have shelter—darling."

Paulette stopped plaiting her hair to a thick rope.

"Say that again," she murmured curiously.

"What—Skunk's Misery?" But suddenly I understood, and used that word I had never said aloud before: "Skunk's Misery is our only chance, darling, darling! Get up and come on."

But she spoke without moving.

"Want to tell you something first. The tunnel falling in wasn't all the reason I ran after you. I thought—thought Dick couldn't dare shoot at you if I were between you and him. Oh, Nicky, don't kiss my horrid chapped hands!"

But I was glad to hide my humbled face on them, remembering how I had stormed at her. I muttered—

"Why didn't you tell me out there on the lake?"

"Well, you were pretty unpleasant, and—" as I kissed her, my dream-girl I had never thought to touch—"oh, Nicky, how

Digitized by Google

could I? I did everything last night but say, 'Nicholas Dane Stretton, I love you.' And all the notice you took was to help me with a face as long as your arm. You never even answered me when I called you Nicky by mistake!"

I hadn't dared. But it was no time to be talking of those things. Let alone that my wet breeches had frozen till I felt as if my legs didn't belong to me, we had landed exactly where old Thompson had been drowned. I wanted to get away from there quick, leaving no more trail than was necessary. I looked round me and saw how to do it.

In front of us was the hole in the shore-ice, and all the smash and flurry where we had gone through. Where we had crawled ashore under the intact ice roof was bare rock, wind-swept clean. It struck me that with a little management, and to a cursory inspector, it could look as if Paulette and I were drowned like Thompson.

The snow had not piled on this side the lake as it had on ours. Detached rocks, few but practicable stepping-stones, lifted their bare bulk out of it, between us and the spruce bush we had to strike through to avoid the Halfway and Macartney's picket. Some kind of a trail we must leave to Skunk's Misery, but it need not begin here in the first place Macartney would look, if he were alive to look anywhere.

Paulette's eyes followed mine as I thought it, and she nodded. It was without a track of any sort, after the lake trail ended, that she and I stopped in the thick spruces and put on our snow-shoes for the last lap of the way to Skunk's Misery.

My dream-girl's trained young body served her gloriously. As she stepped out after me I would never have guessed she had run a yard. It was easy enough to avoid the Halfway and unlikely that Macartney's men would ever discover our devious track in the thick bush.

Crossing the Caraquet road was the only place where we had to leave a track in the open. I did the best I could with it by picking up Paulette and carrying her and her shoes into thick bush again; but I could not honestly feel much pleasure in my effort. Anybody with any sense would know my sunken shoe marks had carried double, but it was the best I could do. It was no pleasure to me, either, to hear Paulette exclaim sharply as I set her down:

"Nicky, I forgot. Dick can snow-shoe after us, if he's alive! Charliet made lots of snow-shoes in odd times, to sell in Quebec if he ever went back there. They were piled up in the shed behind the kinty, and I believe Dick knew, though he didn't think of it in time to save his men. If he follows us—" her lip curled in fear and hatred—"I—oh, I hope he's dead!"

So did I. But somehow I had never felt it.

"Well, if he isn't," I said roughly, "he'll have to do twenty-two miles to catch up to our five, and then some to Skunk's Misery. He couldn't make good enough time round the lake to catch us tonight, supposing he knew where we were going; even on the chance of him, we've got to have one night's rest. And our only place to find it is Skunk's Misery!"

Paulette nodded and stepped out after me once more. It was dead toil in the soft snow, and it was slow; for, Macartney or no Macartney, there was no making time in the untrodden bush.

I cut our way as short as I dared, but do the best I could, it was dark when we came to that forlorn, evil hollow in the gap of desolate hills that Caraquet folk called Skunk's Misery. That had its points though, considering we needed to reach Macartney's old lean-to unseen, for the Skunk's Misery population was in bed, and, as I said before, they had no dogs to yelp at us.

In dead silence, with Paulette holding to my coat and our snow-shoes under our arms, we went Indian file through the maze of winding tracks Skunk's Misery used for roads, under rocks and round them; and on the hard-trodden paths our feet left no trace. At least I thought so; and it was just where I slipped up. If I had looked behind me, when Paulette would not let me carry her snow-shoes, I would have seen the tails of them dragging a tell-tale cut in the snow behind her, as they sagged from her tired arm. But my eyes were straight before me, on the door of Macartney's lean-to. It hung open, as it always hung, but I only glanced in to make sure it was empty.

It was elsewhere I was going, round the huge boulder that backed the place and down a gully that apparently brought up against blind rock; only I knew better. I found the opening of the rocky passage I had wormed down once before, with my

Digitized by Google

back scraping the living rock between me and the sky; and on my hands and knees, with Paulette after me, I went down it again. It ended without warning, just as I had known it would end, in an open cave; a glow of fire ahead of me; and, stooping over it—as I had never imagined I should see with joy and gratitude—the boy I had left there, toasting a raw rabbit on a stick.

That was all I saw. And what possessed me I don't know, but I turned to Paulette with a sudden wave of stale jealousy overwhelming me, and a question I had kept back all the afternoon:

"Paulette, you're sure, sure—it's me, and not Dudley? That you didn't love the poor chap best?"

Paulette came to her feet beside me.

"It's you," she said clearly. "I told you Dudley never loved me, nor I him. I'll mourn for him always, for he met his death through me. But he never wanted to marry me, and if he were alive he'd be the first person to tell you so!"

There was a pause, definite, distinct, while you could count five. The boy at the fire started to frozen attention at sight of us, as sharply as his distorted body could start. But before he could speak, or I did, another voice answered Paulette's from the dark of the cave behind the fire, an unexpected, mind-shattering voice, that took me toward it with one bound.

"By gad!" it said. "He would, would he? Two things have to go to that!"

I stood paralyzed where I had jumped. Paulette's snow-shoes dropped clattering on the cave floor. Dudley—Dudley Wilbraham whom the wolves had eaten—little, fat, with a face more like an egg than ever, but whole and alive—stood in the dimness of the cave behind the fire and my Skunk's Misery boy.

XIX

SKUNK'S MISERY

"OH, MY heavens! Dudley!" gasped Paulette, and went straight to pieces.

I don't know that I made much of a job of being calm myself. All I could get out was:

"The wolves—we thought they'd eaten you! Paulette found your cap by the Caraquet road!"

Dudley, whom the whole of La Chance had beaten the bush for all one livelong night, whom his own sister had sworn was killed and eaten, Dudley made the best show of the three. He had a flask, of course—when had he not? He dosed Paulette and me with what was left in it, but even with the whisky limbering my throat I hadn't sense to ask a coherent question. Dudley looked from Paulette to me, and spoke pretty collectedly to both of us.

"I wasn't eaten, if that's what brought you two here—though judging from your conversation I imagine it wasn't. Thank the Lord you are here, anyway. I've been pretty wild, tied up underground with this snow! But—where the devil's Marcia?" sharply.

"Hidden away from Macartney, with Charliet to look after her."

It was all I could bring myself to say, except that she thought Dudley was dead.

"Does Macartney think so too?" the corpse demanded.

"He worked hard enough to feel safe in thinking it," I returned bitterly, and came out with the whole story: That Macartney said the wolves had howled round the shack till their noise drove Dudley distracted, and he slipped out after them unnoticed, with a gun; that Macartney, the two girls and half the men had gone to look for him, when he never returned, till Paulette found his wolf-doped cap torn up by the Caraquet road, and Marcia found him, in the bush, unrecognizable but for what rags of his sable-lined coat were left on his body. And Dudley's hard-boiled-egg face never changed with a word of it.

"So that was how it was worked," he reflected quite composedly. "And Macartney thinks it was me Marcia found! Well, it wasn't—though I daresay it was my coat all right, like it was my cap Paulette picked up by the road. But it —— well would have been me, if it hadn't been for—" he paused casually, and pointed behind him—"Baker!"

"Baker! That good-for-nothing devil who was always trailing after you? Why, Macartney——"

But I remembered Macartney had only said Baker was missing too. I wheeled on the dimness of the inside cave and saw what I had missed in my flurry over Dudley. A second man, white-faced, black-eyebrowed, slim-looking, was standing just where the fire glow did not reach him, staring at Paulette and me. I said:

Digitized by Google

"Land of love! Baker!" And I may be forgiven if I swore.

"Yes," Baker nodded as undramatically as Dudley, "it was me! I had sense enough all along to guess Macartney was going to finish Mr. Wilbraham with the wolf-dope he'd tried out on you, if the rest of the gang hadn't. And I wouldn't stand for sculduggery like that, for one thing; and for another, I thought I'd come out better in the end by sticking to the boss, like you seen me doing often enough! So I just told him he was being lain for, and brought him out here. I knew this cave was safe, for I lived here two months before me and the rest of us dribbled in to La Chance. And I knew the Halfway wasn't—for the two men who turned Billy Jones out of it with a sham letter from the boss, were the two who drowned old Thompson! I've played honest in my way, Mr. Stretton — if you never thought so."

"Shut up!" Dudley interrupted him indignantly. "I'd be where Marcia thought she found me, if it hadn't been for you! Listen, Stretton! I got fussy after you left for Billy Jones's that afternoon; I'd been hitting it up the day before, and you know how that leaves me. I didn't see why in blazes I hadn't gone with you to Billy's instead of sitting round the house, and a couple of hours after you left I started out to get a horse and follow you. But it's a lie that I heard wolves, or thought of them. There wasn't one round the house! Macartney wasn't round, either. I guess he was out in the bush fixing up the wolf-baited ground that was to get me, for he'd fixed up my coat and cap with it before he started. I thought something smelled like the devil when I put them on, but I never guessed it was them.

"I went out to the stable just like any other day, only nobody happened to see me go, and right there I ran on Baker. I told him to come for a ride with me, but he didn't seem to think much of the horse racket; said he knew a short cut to Billy's, and it would be better for my head if we just walked. It was Baker told me the devilish reek I smelled was coming from my own coat, and I chucked it down by the stable door. God knows who of Macartney's men picked it up and wore it after I left it, for Marcia to find," even Dudley looked sick, "but it wasn't me! I smelled my cap, too, after I'd walked some of the muzziness out of me, and I threw that away where Paulette found it.

"We didn't leave a sign of a track, of course; it was long before there was any snow. If I'd known why Baker had me out there walking away from La Chance, I'd have turned back and defied Macartney, or I'd never have started. But it wasn't till it was black dark, and I'd walked sense enough into myself to ask why we were not getting to Billy Jones's, that Baker took his life in his hands, for you may bet I was fighting mad at having seemed to run away, and told me that you and I, and all of us, were in a trap that was going to spring and get us and give Macartney our mine. He let out about Thompson's murder and you and the wolf-dope; and that Macartney'd kicked Billy Jones out of the Halfway with a forged dismissal from me, and had his own men waiting there to get you, while he limed the bush, and my cap and coat, for the wolves to get me. And you know I'd have been dead sure to go out after them with a gun, just as he said I did, if I'd heard them come yowling round the shack while I was in it!

"I'd have gone back even then, only—well, you've had experience of Macartney's wolves, and you'd know I couldn't! We could hear the row they were making even where we were, miles away. We set off on the dead run for Caraquet and help, but we had to break the journey somewhere. We couldn't face Macartney's men at Billy's, for neither of us had a gun—and that's another lie to Macartney—and it was no good losing the devil to run into hell. So Baker brought me here."

"But," I gasped, "I don't see how you missed me! I was here too, that night!"

"Well, we weren't—till the morning," Dudley snapped in his old way. "It was just beginning to snow when we crawled down the burrow you'd crawled out of and found this place—and your boy."

"But I told him—d'ye mean he just let you find him?"

"He did not," grimly. "He was hidden away somewhere, and I don't suppose he'd ever have come out, if I hadn't happened to use what seems to have been your password! I said out loud that I'd give twenty dollars to any one who'd get me some food; and out comes your friend and says you told him to trust any one who said that,

Digitized by Google

and where was the twenty? So, after that, we settled down!"

"But—" Dudley's selfishness had always been colossal, yet this time it beat me—"what did you suppose was going to become of your sister and Paulette, left with Macartney when you'd disappeared, and the Halfway picket had got me?" I burst out.

"My acquaintance with you made me hopeful they wouldn't get you," Dudley began dryly, "and as for the girls—" But his sham indifference broke down. "Don't talk of it, will you?" he bellowed. "I did think you'd be all right, but I was in hell for those girls till I could get to Caraquet and take back help for them! Only this —— snow stopped me. We had to wait till it was packed enough for Baker to sneak down to the Halfway and steal a couple of my own horses for us to ride into Caraquet. But that's how I'm here, and how Marcia found a half-eaten man in my top-coat that she thought was me!"

I was speechless. It was all so simple, even to Dudley's twenty dollars and my boy. But before I could say so Dudley turned on me with his old vicious pounce:

"Why in blazes don't you tell me what you left Marcia for, after bullying me because I did? And why are you and Paulette here, if you thought I was killed?"

"We left her because we had to, with a thousand tons of earth between us and the only way we could have got back to her alive," said I wrathfully. "And as for why we're here——"

I poured out the whole story of my return to La Chance, from Dudley's own funeral procession that met me, and my bootless fight with Macartney, to the resurrection of Collins and Dunn, and Paulette's and my race across Lac Tremblant. I left out Marcia's share in my defeat, but Dudley gave a comprehending sniff.

"Marcia always was a fool about Macartney. But it's no matter, since she isn't with him, whether he's alive or dead! Only you were another fool, Stretton, to cross that lake with a girl in tow. I don't know why you weren't both drowned, like Thompson."

But his voice broke. He was a good little man, under his bad habits, or he never would have done what he had for Paulette. He muttered something about all the decent men who'd met their death because he wouldn't listen to Paulette when she tried to tell him the truth about Macartney, damned him up and down, and turned to Paulette with a sweet sort of roughness:

"You look done up, my girl! Here, get down by the fire and eat what our chef's got ready."

For the lame boy had gone on with his cooking, regardless of the talk round him, and his rabbit was done.

But Paulette never looked at the food Dudley held out to her.

"You're not angry, Dudley," she asked very low, "for what I said to Nicky as we came in?"

"I was," but Dudley grinned in the half dark. "It was true enough, only nobody likes to hear their own obituary. But I knew about Stretton long ago, if you hadn't the sense to. You take him, my child, and my blessing. God knows I never asked you to marry an old soak like me!"

He shoved Paulette's hand into mine and stared at the two of us for a second.

"By gad!" he added in a different voice. "I hope Macartney's got drowned, or he may walk in on the lot of us!"

"How?" I demanded scornfully. "He couldn't do thirty-two miles in the time Paulette and I did fifteen, even if he knew where to do it to!"

"He doesn't have to, my young son," Dudley stood musing on it. "Baker and I didn't do any twenty, coming here; and it was Macartney's own path we came by. That doesn't go round by any Halfway! If he takes a fancy to come here by it, and strikes your tracks as you two came into Skunk's Misery, the rest wouldn't take him long. I believe—hang on a minute, while I speak to Baker!"

He wheeled suddenly and disappeared into the dark of the cave where Baker stood aloof.

"You needn't worry about Macartney," I said to Paulette. "We didn't leave any tracks, once we got into broken snow!"

I turned at a rustle behind me—and looked straight into the muzzle of Macartney's revolver, and Macartney's eyes.

XX

THE END

THE boy at the fire let out a yelp and dropped flat. Dudley and Baker, invisible somewhere, neither spoke nor stirred. And I stood like a fool, as near the

Digitized by Google

death of Nicholas Dane Stretton as ever I wish to get,

But Macartney only stood there, looking so much as usual that I guessed he must have rested outside the mouth of our burrow before he wormed down to tackle me.

"You wouldn't have left any tracks," he said in his every-day manner, if it had not been for the dog's grin he always wore when he was angry, "if I hadn't run on single snow-shoes carrying double, where you crossed the Caraquet road; and if one of you hadn't trailed your shoe-tails through Skunk's Misery—that doesn't wear them!"

"How did you get here?" said I slowly, because I was calculating my spring to Macartney's gun-hand.

"I walked," and I thought he had not noticed I was half a step nearer him. "If you meant me to drown myself following you over your lake, I didn't, thanks to the kind warning you made of my men! But I didn't imagine you'd drowned yourselves either, after I looked through a glass. Charliet had plenty of snow-shoes cached away; I was always quick on my feet; and after I struck your track the rest was simple, especially as you were fool enough to bring a girl here. I—" But his level voice was suddenly thick with passion: "Get back! If you even try to grab my gun I'll shoot you and your boy, too, like dogs. You'll stay still and listen to what I've to say. I've an account to settle with you, Stretton, now that I've cleaned up Dudley's and he's dead!"

You could have heard a pin drop in the dead silence of that underground hole. Neither Dudley nor Baker stirred, and it hit me like a hammer that Macartney didn't know they were alive. *He didn't know!*

I stood as if I had been struck dumb; so did Paulette. Neither of us even flickered an eyelash toward the shadows behind us where Dudley must be crouching anything but dead, with Baker beside him. Perhaps it struck both of us, simultaneously, that Dudley had heard Macartney coming before we did and disappeared on purpose, thinking Macartney might let out naked truths to Paulette and me, where he would have varnished them up to a mysteriously resurrected employer whom he might yet bamboozle as he had always bamboozled him. Anyhow, neither of us saw fit to give Dudley away. Macartney sneered into our silent faces.

"There's not much fight in you," he said contemptuously. "Though it was never any good to try to fight me. I've been all the brains of the business here, single-handed, if you'd like to have it in black and white. It was I got the secret of the wolf-bait from your lame friend here—" he pointed with his unoccupied hand to my groveling boy—"when first I followed Paulette out from New York, and laid up in Skunk's Misery to wait till I had a clear way to get to La Chance. That old ass Thompson gave me that, when I scooped him up on the road. When I'd used him, two of my men drowned him in Lac Tremblant—and you'd never have guessed a word about it, if it hadn't been for his cursed card they overlooked in the shack here, where you found it. It was I put that bottle in your wagon the day it broke there. I did it before I knew Paulette was going to drive with you. That was the only thing in the whole business that ever gave me a scare! And I got rid of Collins and Dunn—" I saw stupidly that he believed it, just as he believed he was rid of Dudley—"and the most of your men who might have stuck by you if it came to a fight for the mine. I had to shoot the last four of them, as you didn't find out that night in the assay office!

"I baited the bush that rid me of Dudley Wilbraham with his yells about emeralds and hunting down Thompson's murderer—and I've got your and his mine, in spite of your blowing up and drowning all the men I meant to hold it with. But you got at most of that, even if it was a little late. What you didn't get at, nor Dudley either, was that he was right about Van Ruyne's emeralds!"

Paulette leaped up like a wildcat.

"You mean you took them!"

"I took them," he nodded sneeringly, and I saw her eyes blaze. "I took them to get you into a hole you'd have to come to me to get out of!"

"But I didn't have to come to you. I—" she spoke with sudden, cutting deliberation—"I don't believe you! You were never in the Houstons' house that night. I should have seen you."

"Oh, seen me!" Macartney grinned.

I think the two of them forgot me, forgot everything but that they were facing each other at last, with the masks off. I know neither of them heard a slow creeping, nearing sound in the long burrow

Digitized by Google

behind Macartney, a sound that swung my blood up with the wild, furious hope that Collins and Dunn—anyhow Collins—was hot on Macartney's trail as he had been on Paulette's and mine; crept down the burrow behind him now, ready to take him in the rear when I jumped at him from the front.

I waited till whoever it was came close up; waited for the moment to grab Macartney, watching his triumphant, passionate eyes as he stared victoriously at Paulette.

"Seen me," he repeated, and I hoped the sound of his own voice would deafen him to that other sound, that was so loud to me. "You saw the Houstons' guests, and their servants! You never thought of seeing the expert who was down from New York about the heating of Mrs. Houston's new orchid houses. I left the real man dead drunk in New York, in a place he couldn't leave in a hurry, but the week-end you spent at the Houstons' I, and my plans, had the run of Mrs. Houston's library, that neither she nor any one else ever goes into. And—" he laughed outright—"it was next your sitting-room, opening on the same upstairs balcony! I had only to put my hand through an open window to scoop Van Ruyne's emeralds out of their case while you had your back turned writing the note you sent outside the case instead of in! Remember?" But this time he did not laugh. "I missed fire about getting you that night, thanks to that fool Wilbraham happening round with his car. But now I'll take all I did this whole business for—and that's you, Paulette Valenka!"

Paulette never took her eyes from him.

"That's a lie," she said quite evenly. "Oh, not that you took the emeralds—I believe that. But it wasn't only to get me into trouble. It was for themselves! You hadn't one cent."

"Not then!"

Even in the gloom I saw two scarlet spots flare out like sealing-wax on the always dead blondness of Macartney's cheeks, I thought I could hear his heart beat where I stood.

"But I have now! With the emeralds, your late friend Dudley's mine, and you—" his voice was unspeakably, insultingly significant, but that unheard rustle behind him, growing nearer, more unmistakable, kept me motionless—"by Heaven, a man might call himself rich! Did you suppose Stretton here could fight me? Why—" He was round on me like light, his revolver six inches from my ear. "Stand there!" he shouted at me. "And die like Wilbraham, you——"

His hand dropped, his jaw fell with the half-spoken words in it; his eyes, all pupils, stared over my shoulder. I turned and saw Dudley; silent, watching us both; saw him even before I grabbed the gun out of Macartney's hanging, lax hand. But Macartney never so much as felt me do it. He stared paralyzed at Dudley—little, fat, with a face like a hard-boiled egg—standing silent against the dark of the inner cave.

Dudley had a nerve when you came through to it.

"I've not died, yet," he snarled out suddenly.

I had the only gun in the place and the drop on Macartney; but I never stirred. That long-heard rustle in the burrow was close on us.

"My God!" said I. "Marcia!"

I never even wondered about Collins and Dunn letting her get away. Marcia stood up in the entrance from the burrow, panting, purple-faced, exhausted. Marcia sprang to Macartney—not Dudley, I doubt if she even saw Dudley—with a cry out of her very soul.

"Dick, you're not Hutton—you never took those emeralds—and for that girl! It's a lie. Say it's a lie, and it's I you love! Dick, say you love me still!"

MACARTNEY flung back a mechanical hand and swept her away from him like a fly. She fell, and lay there. None of us had said a word since Dudley came out and faced Macartney. None of us said a word now. I saw, almost indifferently, Collins burst out of the burrow behind Macartney, as Marcia had burst out, and grab me.

"Stretton," he gasped, "thank God—found your tracks. But that she-devil Marcia got away from me, and——"

But in his turn he jerked up where he stood, at sight of Dudley, and stood speechless.

But I never looked at him. I looked at nothing but Macartney's face.

It was rigid, as if it were a mask that had frozen on him. The sealing-wax scarlet on his cheeks had gone out like a turned-out lamp. His eyes went from Dudley to

Digitized by Google

Collins, and back again, as if they were the only living part of his deathly face.

"Ah," said Macartney. "A-ah!"

He dropped on the floor all in one piece, like a cut-down tree.

Collins made a plunge for him. I sent Collins reeling.

"Let him alone, you young fool!" I swore. "We've got him, and he's fainted. I've seen him like this before—the night after he shot our own men in the assay office. It's only his old fainting fits."

"It's his new death," said Dudley quite quietly. He came forward and bent over Macartney, laid a hand on his breast. "Can't you see the man's gone, Stretton? It killed him—the run here—the shock of seeing me. He must have had a heart like rotten quartz!"

Paulette, Collins, Baker, all of us, stood there blankly. We had not struck a blow, nor raised a voice among the whole fool lot of us. Macartney's gun was still warm from his grasp whence I had snatched it. And Macartney, masquerader, thief, murderer, lay dead at our feet. I heard myself say out loud:

"His heart was rotten. That was why he fainted in the assay office. But—oh, the man was mad! He must have been."

And over my words came another voice. It was Marcia's, and it made me sick.

"Macartney," she was screaming, "Macartney!"

She ran round and round like a hen in a road, before me, Dudley, all of us, then flung herself on her brother, as if she had only just realized him.

"You're alive, you're not dead! Can't you see he never stole any emeralds nor loved that girl, any more than he killed you? You made up lies about him, all of you! And you stand here, doing nothing for him. He—oh, Dick, speak to me, Dick!"

She sprang to Macartney, dropped on her knees by the dead, handsome length of him, tore open his coat and shirt. But she knelt there, rigid, with her hand on his quiet heart.

Macartney had never stolen Van Ruyne's emeralds; she had just said it. There, round Macartney's bared throat, lying on the white skin of his chest, green lights in the dull fire-glow of the cave, were Van Ruyne's emeralds, that Paulette Brown—whose real name was Tatiana Paulina Valenka—had never seen nor touched since she put them back in Van Ruyne's velvet case.

I will say Marcia Wilbraham knew when she was beaten. She cowered back to Dudley and began to cry. But it was with her arms round his neck. And the fat little man held her to his queer, kind heart.

I turned my back sharply on the two of them, and my eyes met Paulette's.

There would be all sorts of fuss and unpleasantness to go through, with the sheriff from Caraquet, and what was left of Macartney; old Thompson's death to be accounted for; Van Ruyne's emeralds to be returned to him, so that Tatiana Paulina Valenka, and not Paulette Brown, could marry that lucky, Indian-dark fool who was Nicky Stretton.

There was Dudley's mine, too, all safe again, and such a big thing that even I would be passably rich out of it.

But I barely, just barely thought of all those things.

My dream-girl's blue eyes were like stars in mine, under the burnt gold of her silk, soft hair, the clear carnation rose in her cheeks as I looked at her where she stood close to me, all mine, as I had always dreamed she would be, till I met her and was sick with doubt of it. She was mine.

As far as I was concerned this story had ended at Skunk's Misery, where it had begun, if I had only guessed it. I gave an honest start as Collins jogged my elbow.

"We can't stay here, with that," he whispered, nodding at Macartney. "What do you think about getting out of this? We could leave him here, with Baker and the boy, till we can get the Caraquet people to come and see him. We've your snow-shoes, and mine and the girl's, besides Macartney's that I guess he's done with. I think we could manage along as far as the Halfway in the morning, if we made a travoy of boughs for Wilbraham!"

"But," I stared at him, "Macartney's picket's there!"

"Oh, Charliet and Dunn were going to clear them out with Miss Wilbraham's rifle, while I got after her when she broke away on to Macartney's track here," said Collins calmly. "I expect that's all right, and they've run. Anyhow, you've got Macartney's gun! You can go ahead and see."

But I had no need to, particularly. An abandoned picket has a way of knowing when the game is up, and Macartney's men had cleared out on the double, even before

Digitized by Google

Charliet's first rifle-bullet missed them. We got them afterward, half-dead in the bush—but that doesn't come in here.

I walked into the Halfway with my dream-girl beside me, and both of us jumped as Dudley suddenly poked his pig-eyed face between us.

"You needn't hop, you two," he commented irritably, "you can have your Old Nick, Paulette, for all me! What I'm thinking of's that boy—and Baker. I guess they saved my life all right, and I'm going to set 'em up for what's left of theirs. Got anything to say against that, hey?" with his old snarl.

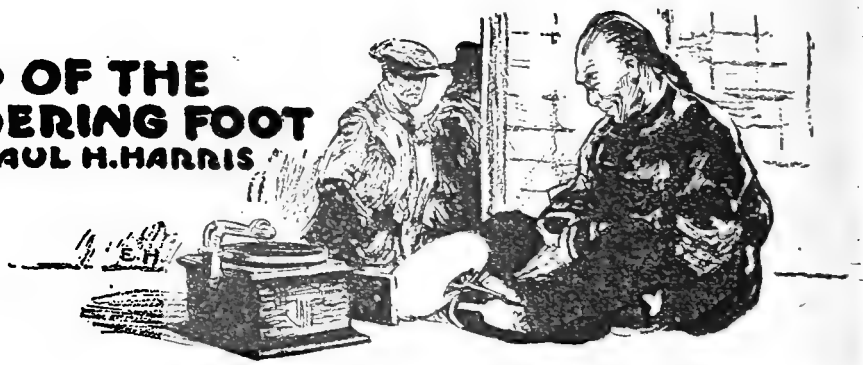
"Not much," I returned soberly. But Paulette got both Dudley's hands in hers.

"Oh, dear Dudley," she said softly.

There were tears in her eyes. I know, for I kissed them away afterward when we were alone.

SHEP OF THE WANDERING FOOT

by PAUL H. HARRIS



HAVE you ever known one of these young fellows who have lived a fast span in towns like Port Said, Shanghai, Vladivostok, Manila, or Singapore — I mean one of those who crowded twenty years of work and humdrum into five of spice?

They're interesting.

Such a roustabout was "Shep."

One night a few weeks back I surprised him on the Oakland mole.

"Hello, old-timer," he greeted, "I was just watching the *Korea* pull out. How's tricks?"

I smiled when I saw the old wanderlust sparkle in his eyes as the big liner left her smoky flourish on the sky.

"Thinking of going back?"

The question brought on a stream of denials, a claim that he "was going to get into a city directory for once in his life" and was through, absolutely through.

So we sat there on the dock and swung our legs over the water and smoked and talked — talked of horse-races, chicken-fights, idol worship and Shantung silks—but with his continued reiteration that he was through with wandering. Finally we went up to his room in the Santa Fé and partook of a seltzered affair of his manufacture, while I heard the story of the kidnaped sample trunks, won from an intoxicated salesman—the Irishman and the Jew, the black-eyed Lady Frances and the prize-fight at Changsuho.

Shep, puffing contentedly, gave me this tale.

ADOLPH and I ran across a crap-shooting salesman up in Seattle a few years ago, with the result that before that eventful evening was o'er, Adolph Meyers and his good friend, your plaintiff, were aboard the *Empress of India*, bound for Shanghai, which is in the Empire of China.

We had won everything else the said commercial gentleman owned and he insisted on shooting the trunks, which he misleadingly claimed were his own. When we discovered otherwise after we were about three days from port, we composed a diplomatic note to the jobbers who owned them and informed said firm that it looked like a good line and we might as well represent them in Shanghai as anybody, since we were going there anyhow. This note we mailed from Kobe, shortly after the which we blew

Digitized by Google

into Shanghai, the town that had lost the low and intermediate from its transmission.

Very speedy town, Shanghai, very. And a cosmopolitan burg? You know it.

When we landed at the Queen's Dock, I saw two short-card men from Manila and a 'Frisco dip in the genteel crowd lined up to greet us. It looked like a jail delivery and Adolph pronounced it a good sign, because no dead town attracts crooks.

We got established at a swagger big hotel, the Astor, backed up against the Yangtze-Kiang and surrounded by giant palms, with conservatories, ball-rooms, cracked ice, a house physician and every convenience.

Adolph just tucks his napkin around his hips that first night in the Astor's main dining-room, runs his eyes over the undulating vampires, dress-suits and wine buckets floating by and opines that we have struck pay-dirt.

And the very next morning there's a cable for us from the firm we had decided to work for, telling us to see a Chink *compradore* in Shanghai who had been representing them in a lazy sort of way, present the wire as authority and get our cards printed, pay our own expenses and sell our heads off if we wanted to. Didn't even ask what had become of the poor crap-shooter they had originally billeted for China—asked no questions and let all bets ride.

Friend *compradore* has us in to tea in his office and we squat around on our heels and try to drink it like he does, holding the cup and saucer in one hand and doing all the drinking and manipulating without the aid of your other, pow-wow heap much and finally receive his smiling assurances of great good-will and any little thing our hearts desire.

We go away from there with all the f. o. b. Shanghai prices on the line; beat it back to the hotel; unpack the trunks and get sample-rooms.

And I want to tell you that before the week was out, I myself sold five thousand dozen number one woolen socks and unbelievable crates of work gloves—me who didn't know woolen sock talking points if I met 'em in the road. And Adolph! You heard his name, didn't you?

To cut that part of it short, we book a lot of orders, send 'em over collect cables, work like the dickens, and in about a month and a half the goods show up, are paid for and we collect our little old commission at the bank, which in due English fashion remits the remainder of the bally principal to the 'ouse.

My boy, in six months we had sold everybody within one hundred miles of Shanghai who had any earthly use for any of the hundreds of articles contained in those wonderful trunks—our fame went abroad in the land and the team of the Irishman and the Jew began to roll in predatory wealth, Mex.

Of course not a whole lot of it stuck to our fingers. Shanghai didn't boast a single savings-bank that I remember.

Up and down we would go—but having the time of our young lives—and playing one hunch after the other.

ONE day Meyers confides in me that he's getting kind of soft for the lady who runs the curio store in the Astor House, a dreamy brunette yclept Frances. Nobody knew her last name, but her haughty carriage and well enameled face brought her the tag of Lady Frances. She was young, at that, and mighty easy to look at. I'd never paid a whole lot of attention to her, but when Adolph brought the subject up in a hinting sort of way, I admitted that walking up the aisle with Lady Frances wouldn't be such an irksome task at that.

"She says she might give me the up and down if I'd cut out this high-life stuff," says Adolph, and for quite a while he's steady like a clock and takes deep breathings by his window in the morning, up with the birds and all that.

Whereupon Lady Frances grinned upon his suit.

Of course, I'm rocking along in my own wild young way and caring nary a care for the morrow, tra, la, lee, but I don't want to lose a live partner, so I do take time to try and get a line on the fair one.

The attack direct doesn't cash any bets for me, because when I'd mooch into her *maison de curios*—get that—she'd just roll those limpid orbs of hers, goo-goo a couple of times when the subject of Adolph was brought up, dig me in the ribs with a fan, and call me a scheming devil. And, gosh, but she could make you feel like you were a regular old di-do match-maker. Gee! She did have the way with her.

All I could elucidate was that her parentage was of the best, her home town was

Digitized by Google

Brooklyn, and her sister was a missionary up in Hankow. Said she had come over with Sis and was trying to make enough money to take 'em both back to the States, where "dear Florence wants to take a post graduate in medicine."

All that seemed fair enough, but I'd just go out on the promenade piazza after these interviews, mingle with the *haut monde*—get that, boy—and wake up a few minutes afterward to the realization that I was just where I started on my little investigation of Lady Frances. Not that I was trying to get anything on her, you understand, but it's serious with Adolph, and I don't want to see his foot slip.

And, too, I had a hunch.

You know, the books have it that the fair sex has a great gift of intuition, but they haven't got any corner on it, and I was just masculine enough to feel that my intuition regarding that Lady Frances girl was correct—and it was that she was a cold-blooded lassie, cold as a seal's Winter home.

Of course, that's nothing particular against her, and I just have to stand by and see Adolph slipping his anchor, with me tied to the mast.

Well, friend, one night things come to a head.

Lady Frances admits to Adolph that she's willing to trot double, but she is canny in her willingness, and before she throws aside her natural maidenly reserve, will he please show her his bank-book? She's mighty frank and sensible about it, according to my ensnared partner, and tells him that she wants to go back to the States with the husband she adopts and open up a nifty little shop on Fifth Avenue.

That kind of appeals to him, too, but the bank-book proviso knocks him dead.

We've been rolling 'em pretty high—our reputation for good fellowship being an expensive one to maintain—so when we come to adding up our wad we discover that we're just about five thousand strong between us. And Adolph has cracked to her, in an offhand and careless way, that he's ten thousand strong!

Of course, this financial stuff was too much to the Bradstreet to suit me, and I felt my cold hunch grow firm; but of course I can't knock the Lady Frances to Adolph in his then state of mind. So I propose to him that we take a trip down through the provinces and sell about five hundred phonographs we've taken a gamble on.

That would serve to get us nearer the ten thousand he had laid claim to and would get his mind off her for a little while.

He agrees to this in a minute, confides to his lady love that we are making this last trip, promises to show her the bank-book when he returns, and we are off for the hills and dales of that fair and beautiful land—I don't think!

The reason for my phonograph hunch is that we ought to get good individual and small-lot prices for 'em out in the woods, while the Shanghai market is only fairly profitable and we're likely to get stuck with five hundred phonys if we don't look out.

And again, I had tried my idea out on an old *taotai* down near Nanking on one of our trips. I had given the old boy and his family a phonograph demonstration one day with a sample we had. What he thought of it had made us order five hundred pronto. Why, that old boy listened to "El Capitan" for one hour and a half and was winding her up again when we left with his fifty.

We told him we could send him some more records at five bucks a throw; but his Chinese philosophy was that it wouldn't do to gamble on records, because "El Capitan" was perfectly satisfactory, so why change for another tune that might not show up so well?

This interesting logic of the son of Confucius cheered us up, especially since we would now have to import only one record with each machine, and the records cost almost as much as the phonograph that played 'em. It was made by a mail-order house in Chicago that specializes on forty-nine-cent watches and fifty-five-dollar organs. They cost us nine eighty-five apiece and we figured that an average price of fifty bucks per, cash, was worth going after even in that land of easy money.

So we ship the five hundred discord spreaders ahead of us, take along a dozen at a time in pony-carts, and begin making the tank towns of China.

Did they go good? You know it.

We only struck one burg where they wouldn't part with at least forty, oro, for "El Capitan" and the noise box. I say "El Capitan" because we had let the old *taotai* act as musical critic for the whole China Coast, and his ear was great.

In the one dead burg, we pull a funny flivver.

Digitized by Google

A big part of our success is due to staging the phonograph with trimmings. We used to cover it up back of a curtain and have our Chink friends squatting around on a mat at attention before we start the disk. Then the interpreter tells 'em how this is a wondrous magic box, requests silence, and we bat out old "El Cap" in all its horrible ramifications. I say horrible because by the time we had staged this act in two or three hundred towns, the martial music of the good Professor Sousa paled hellishly.

I don't ever want to hear that tune again.

Well, in this town called Yetsomewhere or syllables closely resembling such a word, we pulled all the usual props, got our high-binders squatted around on the floor and started up with the same old ta-da-de-ra-da umpty-umpty-ump, let her roll for a couple of whirls, and came out from behind our curtains to make the selling talk per friend Wan Kai.

And the audience? It had vamoosed—utter.

Wan Kai says they just naturally folded their tents and swiftly departed; a dignified exit, but thorough.

We made some inquiries at the Consulate in Yetsomewhere and the fat American in charge laughed until his neck got too red. It seems that our audience had been painfully prominent in the recent Boxer Rebellion and that Yetsomewhere had been visited by an American regiment, the band of which played "El Capitan" morning, noon and night.

The visit was all too well remembered, and our entirely ignorant customers had arisen after the first few notes, being confounded within them and imagining that another bunch of Americanos were approaching from beyond the hill. It was a dead town for our business—but the only one.

We wind up that fat trip in Hongkong. Adolph cables the girl that we'll be back in Shanghai pronto. And I, like a jack-rabbit, get mixed up in a fight in the Queen's Hotel while indulging in mild wassail in celebration of our successful foray.

During said mêlée, I get touched for the princely sum of four thousand.

Carried it in a nice, snug money belt, but of course it don't help much when they slug you with a billiard cue and frisk your person while you're in dreamland. That's what they did to me—even took my watch and stick-pin.

I woke up in a nice little garden outside the hotel, in the which I had been deposited after the dreadful deed was done.

The bartender said a couple of sailor friends of mine, who seemed to know me well, had dragged me out from under the bunch and had said they were going to take me to my room for repairs.

When the Chief of Police heard this, he threw up both hands, because an average of fifty ships a day pull out of Hongkong Harbor and in those times there was no wireless in that fair city.

Adolph takes it mighty well. He's a good sport.

But going back on the boat to Shanghai, we figure it out that our combined capital is only five thousand and a few hundred over.

Adolph gets in a poker-game on the trip, cleans up another thousand, hands me that for feed money and borrows the half I have in the other five for a flash on his lady fair.

He told her that was all he could dig up right away and wanted to know if she could see him.

She takes him out on the porch in the moonlight, makes regular love to him and says she will take him the minute he can show ten.

Talked to him in a real lover-like, but business-like way—frank stuff. Adolph had tears in his eyes when he tells me about it—says he's proud to know that she is so sensible and had such a good head for figures. Seems that little old Fifth Avenue shop hadn't gone down in price at all.

She's absolutely unwilling to marry him as long as he has to go off on those dangerous trips into the wild inland country, but promises, as stated, to hitch before the parson the minute he can buy two tickets and show the ten.

Shanghai's worked out pretty nearly—Lady Frances is crying her eyes out because Adolph can't raise the stake—seems on the point of marrying him anyhow two or three times—and the lad and I sit up for a week trying to figure out how to make two blades of silver grow where but one flourished before.

This may seem like pretty bow-legged sequence to you, but stick around, friend, for right here the plot is embellished.

Digitized by Google

JUST when Lady Frances and the kid have got me about bughouse trying to figure out a grand scheme quick—because she's got a cable from New York leaving the offer of the shop open for just three days more—El Salvator stepped into our lives.

He's a gambler named Robinson and they called him the "Deacon" around Shanghai's sporting hangouts.

I don't know what evil bird whispered to him that we are trying to make a quick turn, but it does, and one night the Deacon, Adolph and I are heads together over a flim-flam game he's willing to let us in on.

As he tells it, the Deacon knows of a crooked prize-fight that's going to be pulled off out at Changsuho Gardens, a road-house and pavilion about eight miles from town on the Bubbling Well Road. Fact is, Deacon is right in the thick of the engineering of the trick—says he knows that the Irishman and the Jew are regular fellows, old-timers and all that, and that we won't object to shearing a few tenderfeet if we are let in on a sporting proposition which in reality is a cinch.

One of the pugs is to be Battling Casey, who has licked everybody up and down the coast and then some. The fellow he fights is named St. Clair, just out from the States and carrying a bunch of clippings that were so good that he had no trouble in getting a match with Casey, acknowledged Champion of China.

Casey has won so often and beaten such good men that the odds on him to win are three to one in some bets and easy to get two to one, because everybody regarded Casey as a dead moral cinch.

The plot is that Casey is sick of China, wants to go back home with a little easy money and is letting the Deacon manage the betting end for him, it being agreed between St. Clair and Casey that the fight shall be fixed—Casey, the logical favorite, taking one on the chin in the fourth round and going down and out, while the long-shot betters yell their heads off and the Deacon gives interviews to the papers about its being a lucky punch and they demand a return fight.

Casey, well staged at the game, has rehearsed the knockout with St. Clair in private and they've already fought the whole fight over, blow for blow, about twenty-five times.

It certainly looks like ready money, and is a typical Shanghai trick, but of course Adolph and I don't fall for it too fast because it's a little out of our line. We gambled enough, Lord knows, but this isn't exactly what you'd call gambling.

When the Deacon sees us hesitate, he steps out in the hall and returns in a couple of minutes with Casey, who, after seeing that the transom and windows are closed, allows that what the Deacon says is correct—he's going to take the ten-count in the fourth.

As a reward for putting us next to it, Casey and the Deacon want twenty-five per cent. of our winnings; Deacon agreeing to post every cent we want to bet with a hotel man there named John Barnes, who we all know is straight.

Well, me and the lad retire to the other end of the room for a little confiab, talk earnestly for a couple of minutes, can't find a fall-down in the scheme, and agree to kick in with five thousand as our bet.

Kindly note the mathematics.

The Deacon calls us up later that night, tells us John Barnes is now holding fifteen thousand pesos, oro, which he will pay over to us just as soon as the fatal fourth has passed into history.

See? We stand to win exactly ten thousand—just what little Adolph needed. It seemed like fate.

Adolph isn't fit for business the next day and consented to go out and see Referee Barnes to make sure the stake money is there, which he does between times and when not looking for his fair lady. Seems she had sent down a note that she was indisposed, but certainly hoped for the best and would try and get up later that afternoon and come down and see her Adolph boy.

Which does not interest me a whole lot.

Well, sir, night finally blew around and I made my first visit to Changsuho Gardens. I'll never forget that gang of mud-faced Chinese gamblers, silk-hatted Englishmen, swarthy Punjab soldiers and English sports in evening clothes. Some aggregation!

They were banked deep around the ring and jeered or sang as the preliminary fighters perspired through the curtain-raisers while the Sikh band raised the bamboo roof with "God Save the King," which caused all who could to stand up.

The Deacon saw me and came over to

Digitized by Google

pat me on the back and assure that Casey is fit to lose the battle of his career. His cheering words and confidence helped a lot, because I confess that my palms were slightly damp. If anything slips, me and little Adolph will have to go to work.

After what seemed like ten hours, they came in and I got my glimpse of St. Clair the sure thing, on whom we had bet the family wad—he who was to take the aggressive in the fourth and slip over the right hook which was to wrest the championship from the good-looking brow of the curly-haired Casey.

He was a long, straight-shouldered young thing—kind of tough looking, but with a bum eye and a tissue-paper jaw. I sure didn't like his head looks and wondered how the crowd would take it when Mr. Adonis Casey fell before this lemon.

I say Adonis, because he was just that, was Casey, and you ought to have heard the yell the crowd gave him as the braw lad climbed through the ropes. Gosh, he was cool and collected—just chewed gum and smiled. He looked so certain of himself that I almost forgot the reason for it. Then I had to smile when I remembered the boat he was going to catch in the morning, after the big noise had come off. No wonder he didn't look worried; he was the most confident-looking loser I ever saw.

In fact, he looked too dog-goned self-possessed and I kind of felt uneasy when they got together, because he started slamming St. Clair around from the jump—chasing him all over the ring and the crowd yipping like a bunch of cow-punchers.

However, I settled back in my seat with a few qualms, because I figured that this was the way they had rehearsed it.

Then, too, I had worked a little old spell on the bet, even though it was a sure thing. When I gave the Deacon our wad, I marked a fifty-dollar American bill with my initials in red ink—R. W. S.—down in the right-hand corner underneath the picture of an old guy with chin spinach. That was a superstitious relic of my gambling days in Manila. Learned it from an old Spaniard who told me that money so marked would always come home to its owner, but you mustn't work the spell too hard.

Remember that marked bill.

Well, the fatal fourth finally rolled around.

Casey had been winning off by himself and he starts in with the bell as if he meant to wind it up right there. St. Clair is running away and his eyes are fairly popping out with good old garden variety panic. He's so scared he can't sidestep—just covers up and hangs on.

And then, my boy, when the round is just about half over, Casey shoves St. Clair away with his left, feints, draws down the other boy's guard, whips over that vicious right of his, and g-o-o-d n-i-g-h-t!

If I live to be a hundred, I'll never forget the sound of Sure Thing St. Clair's head bumping the boards.

Was he out? The referee could have counted a hundred.

I sat there in a dream and watched the cushions sailing through the air, heard the crowd yelling, dimly sensed the fact that somebody was pounding me on the back, got mixed up in an awful tangle of maniacs and finally woke up enough to start looking for the Deacon.

He was very much *non est* and it gradually crept through my brain, after I learned that he and Casey had hurriedly departed from the building, that the Irishman and the Jew had been whipsawed off of their feet, double-crossed and robbed—the biters bitten.

I couldn't trust my voice to the telephone, so finally dug out my 'ricksha, piled in and started on the long ride back to the city.

MY COOLIE picked out a narrow 'ricksha road that jutted off the main highway and as we jogged along through the truck farms, with the diseased dogs along the lane howling their accompaniment to my miserable soliloquy, I just laid back in that old 'ricksha and cussed. It sure hurt; not so much on my account, but because of Adolph, Lady Frances and the shattered dreams.

I was just thinking how helpless we were, because nobody would do more than laugh at our story if we were foolish enough to tell it, when I heard the honk of an automobile behind us and my coolie jumped to the side of the Bubbling Well that we had then reached. But he wasn't quick enough to suit the chauffeur, who thought he would skim close to us and give my coolie a lesson. What he didn't know was that the bank where our wheels roosted had caved in and three feet of the road had tumbled into the

Digitized by Google

ditch. Per consequence his right front wheel dived in, shortly followed by auto, chauffeur and howling passengers, in one grand spraddled-out mess.

I ran over, lit a match and found the beloved Deacon and the good fighter, Mr. Casey pinned beneath the tonneau.

Also, by the light of my coolie's lantern, I espied a nice, fat, juicy wad of bills laying there beside the good gambler—my wad.

Without looking the men over—I felt sure they were only knocked silly—I examined that wad and a few bills down from the top found a fifty-dollar American note, lettered down in the right-hand corner with R. W. S. in red ink, just like I knew I would.

Friend wad totaled just exactly fifteen thousand. The Deacon, of course, had put up the ten thousand against our five and had bet against, instead of with us. Evidently St. Clair money had been hard to find, so they decided to pick us out.

Well, I slipped my coolie twenty as the price of silence, knowing that he would commit murder for a couple of dollars more, looked over the two crooks, saw that their necks were not broken, and stopped on our way back to send a doctor out to them—doing this by having my coolie ring the bell and leave word.

Their chauffeur had taken to his heels with fright after the spill. Both of them were knocked silly. Nobody had passed us on the road, so that not a soul knew I had been near the Deacon, Casey or the wad. Not that I cared a whit, because it was our money by rights; but it just showed the break of the luck.

Was Adolph waiting up for me?

You know it. I found him pacing the hotel-lobby and half crazy with sorrow. He had gotten news of the result of the fight over the wire.

"A fine business," he wailed. "Here we are pretty nearly flat broke—the —— fight was not fixed for us to win at all—Frances has disappeared, and I don't know what to do."

Be calm, I told him, be calm. And then I shoved him down in an easy chair and showed him one edge of the wad.

I thought Adolph's derby would fly off he raised his eyebrows so high.

"But how?" he yells; and then I had to quiet him and cheer his ear with the good story in detail.

After which Adolph laughed until he cried and wanted me to come in the bar and have a bottle on him.

But I told him to stick around for Casey and the Deacon. I wanted to see how they looked when they showed up at the hotel that night.

So we stuck around for an hour or so, and about midnight that beautiful pair came sneaking in toward the elevator.

When I saw 'em, I got up, yawned, stretched and pulled that whopping roll out of my pocket and began counting it over.

You ought to have seen the look on their faces!

The Deacon whispered something to Casey, who scratched his bandaged head and shrugged his shoulders just as a bell-boy handed him a note. He took one glance at it, rolled it up in a vicious ball and hurled it from him.

I strolled over to the desk with Adolph and asked the clerk what he knew.

"Well," says he, "something slipped. You see, Lady Frances sold out her shop this afternoon late and is out on a boat in the harbor, waiting for Battling Casey to show up. I sent a preacher out there—they were to get married after the fight tonight."

I thought Adolph would go through the floor.

It took him two days to get the truth through his head—and the Lady Frances sure sailed without either of her swains.

And that's the story.

SHEP yawned, poured a drink and looked to me for comments.

"Well, what do you say?"

"Sounds like China all right," I answered. "When are you going back?"

"Nevurrr a-tall," and he smote the table. "I've got a good job with the house we represented out there in Shanghai. You know me, boy. Little old red bungalow, picket fence, carpet slippers. I'm cured."

Shep paused, whirled the ice in his glass, rolled another cigarette.

"At that I'll confess this is a pretty slow game compared to Shanghai," he sighed, "but it's no way for a man to live—selling phonographs, socks and combs to the heathen. Too easy—too easy. I'm cured."

A long pause.

"Still, some nights I lie awake here and think what a good room I had at the Astor,

Digitized by Google

and how the Italian band used to play out in the Sunken Garden, and how the mandolin songs were sweeter than the clanging of trolleys, with the old Yangtze slapping up against the hotel boat-house, with maybe a launch just coming in from the river and a girl singing.

"Or maybe I think of Adolph and wonder how the durned old Indian's getting along. Yep, I think about it all right, but you heard me, I'm done."

Shep sighed; a funny thing for a satisfied man to do.

"Come in," he barked at the bell-boy.

"Telegram, sir."

I watched his face as the little yellow slip unfolded and he reminded me very much of a boy who sees that Santa Claus got his note about the skates.

Then he let forth a whoop of joy, made a dive for the telephone and threw the cable over to me.

Shanghai, January 10.

ROBERT W. SHEPHERD,
Santa Fé Hotel,
San Francisco.
Shot Deacon jail come yourself or send money.
ADOLPH.

Shep banged the receiver.

"There's a boat pulls out of the Golden Gate at daylight," he chanted, prancing from suit-cases to dresser and closet. "Me for it. I guess the curse is on again—I was kind of hoping I'd hear from the kid again. Funny I should have been telling you that story tonight. Guess the Deacon got peevish."

"When will I see you again?" I called back.

"*Quien sabe?*" laughed the wanderer.

O ADVENTURERS!

by A. JUDSON HANNA

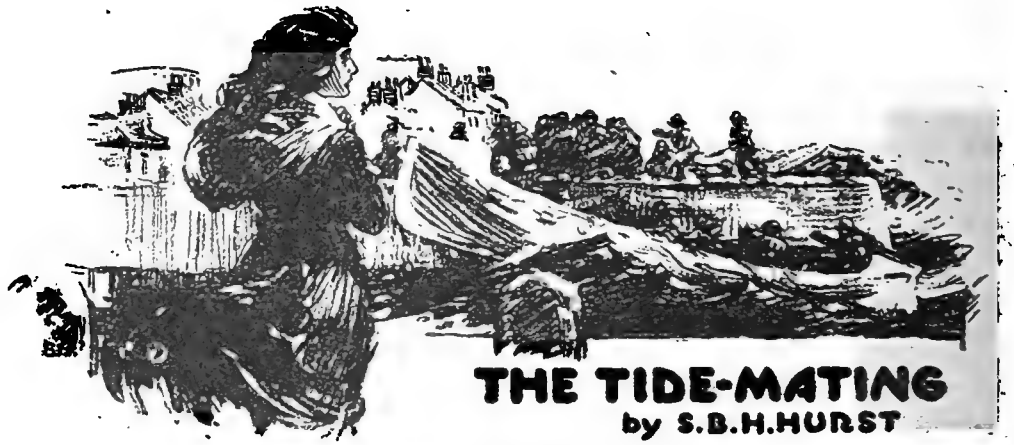
THE charge is loosed; the iron shrieks above it.
On the red board a thousand lives are flung.
Men fall on sleep, and win the prize we covet—
Eternal youth—to live forever young.

To sit at home and feel their powers waning,
Grow old, and lax of hand, and filmy-eyed—
Such slothful death their ardent souls disdaining,
They hurled the gantlet down to Fate—and died.

These to battle have gone up and perished.
But we who sit at home and miss the prize,
Win lesser things their souls had never cherished;
Would we, ourselves, have ruled it otherwise?

Nay, brothers, ye have dared, and won the guerdon.
It is the *loss of you* within us stirs.
Ye bore the heat of battle and the burden.
Death keep you ever young, Adventurers!

Digitized by Google



THE TIDE-MATING

by S.B.H.HURST

Author of "The Receipt," "The Marrow-Bone," etc.

TWO rows of weather-stained cottages, leaning slightly toward each other over a narrow, worn way of cobble-stones; the Ship Inn, a tiny church and the life-boat house. Twenty fishing-boats hauled up on the beach. Snow-covered sand-hills surrounding. Late afternoon. A moaning in the sea-wind, with gulls flying before it. Occasionally a spit of hail.

In the deep window-seat of the living-room of one of the cottages a young man and a young woman sitting. Before the fire, crouching in a chintz-covered rocking-chair, a very old woman staring into the flames, living over her life dreams and making pictures.

"It ain't that I don't love you, Tom," answered the girl. "You know I do—oh, why don't you get a job ashore?"

"Ashore," said the man. "There ain't no shore jobs here, and if there was what could I do—when me and all my folks as far back as I go was sailors? Must be because you're city-born that you can't understand."

"You could go to some place where there was shore jobs."

"I've got my little boat, and I'm independent—do you want me hanging round a town beggin' a job?"

"Do you want me married to you, and you going out in your boat, and you not coming back some day, and me with babies that has to be fed, and crying for daddy that won't never come back? Look at poor Aunt Martha there. She lost her man right out of this village. She likes me to call her 'mother' because she never were a mother. Lucky she were, but the poor dear don't think so."

The girl crossed the room to the rocking-chair, and petted the old woman. "Men drowned and washed up by the tide," she droned, rousing to the girl's caress. "Maybe a man from furrin parts, maybe a man from the village. They take him up, and put him i' the churchyard—the son of some poor mother, the husband of some poor girl; one of those two, surely, maybe both."

"Poor Aunt Martha."

"Aye, dearie. I were the bonniest lass i' this part of England, but I were never the wife nor the mother of any man—I were only the sweetheart, dearie, only the sweetheart."

A single gust of the rising storm rose above its fellows and shrilled mockingly.

"There's weather coming, bad weather," muttered the man. "I smelt it yesterday, afore the gulls started flying ashore."

The girl straightened the pillow behind the old woman's head and returned to the window-seat.

"Smelt it?" she asked, smiling.

"Aye, lass—when the salt gets into your blood, because of you and all of your folks being sailors, you can smell what weather it's going to be."

"Then why do men go out to sea to fish and get drowned?" asked the girl indignantly. "Like Ben Clarkson did a month since—leavin' a wife and babies."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"A feller don't like to be beat," he said. "It's a queer feeling, but you get to feel as

Digitized by Google

how you're bigger than the wind and sea, and you take chances."

The girl put her arms around him and nestled.

"Oh, Tom," she whispered, "Tom, dear, why don't you leave the chance alone—the sea's too treacherous to play with."

The man gulped and kissed her.

"I won't take no chances if you marry me," he murmured. "None in fishing——"

"You're drafting up," broke in the old woman. "You're draftin' up, and there's sorrow in the coals."

"It's in her, too," said the man in a low tone. "She knows when there's weather coming. I've heard for years as how she talks to the fire about it."

"I know," whispered the girl. "And she talks about the man she lost, too."

A heavier squall swept up the narrow street and the window shivered.

"You're draftin' up," went on the old woman, "draftin' up, and there's sorrer i' the coals—mothers that will be sonless, wives that will be husbandless, girls that will be sweetheartless—sorrer in the coals. . . . Ye cruel, cruel wind."

The girl clung more closely to the man.

"It ain't the sea," droned the old woman, "it's the wind. I've seen the sea a-smiling at the sun, all happy, with never a thought of trouble. Then the wind came along—playful at first, just a-teasing—and tickled the sea. And the sea got up a bit, never a-thinking; and the wind went on playin' till the play got rough, so that the sea got rough with it. Never a thought of hurting had the sea, but the cruel, deceivin' wind made it play rough, and there was wrecks."

The carpet billowed slightly with the breath of a louder squall.

"I know ye, ye cruel, cruel wind. Old Martha knows ye—he went out, laffin', laffin', and kissing me good-by, with the sea just a bit playful and the wind only teasin'. And the tide brought him back to me on our wedding morning, out there by the Stanna, where the tide comes in first—back to me drownded, sixty years ago—my John, oh, my bonny, bonny lad—out there by the Stanna where the tide comes in first."

She rocked to and fro. She stopped rocking and leaned forward, staring intently at the fire.

"Sorrer in the coals," she whispered. "A gale and death in the coals. A wreck by the village and dead men on the beach. A big ship, a big ship, not one of the village boats, but—there's dead men on the beach, and the dead men is men of the village."

The girl disengaged herself from her sweetheart and ran to the old woman.

"What men, mother?" she asked eagerly. "And why village men if there ain't a village wreck?"

"Dead men on the beach," moaned the old woman. "Men o' the village drownded on the beach."

"I know what she means," wailed the girl, turning to the man. "She means the life-boat, Tom, and you're the steerer of it."

"It ain't likely," replied the man.

"Oh, Tom," clinging to him, "it is the life-boat, Tom. You said you wouldn't take any chances in your fishing—if you'll promise me not to go out in the life-boat any more—not tonight, if she's called, or any other time—if you'll promise me that, I'll marry you, Tom."

"Lass," said the man huskily, "don't you understand?"

"But there's other men, Tom, not as good as you, maybe, but there is others. Let them go," she wailed.

"Suppose every man promised his wife or sweetheart what you ask me to promise you—what about the people on the wrecks then?"

"You don't have to go, Tom."

"It's a man's job," he said simply.

"And what about the women?"

The man did not answer. He held her close. The wind shrieked, and the room, dusking to the evening shadows, flickered the reflection of the firelight.

"If there's a wreck and you go out in the life-boat tonight, I'll never marry you, Tom—I'll live and die an old maid like poor Aunt Martha," she sobbed.

A heavier squall shook the cottage, and the hail drummed on the baffling glass.

"I must be going, lass."

"Won't you promise me, Tom?" she begged, clinging to him.

"Maybe there won't be a wreck," he parried.

"A wreck in the coals, and dead men on the beach," moaned the old woman.

"You think more of other folks than you do of me," cried the girl.

The man put her away from him very gently.

"If I promised not to go out in the boat—

Digitized by Google

if I let wrecked men drown because you asked me to, you wouldn't think anything of me at all," he answered.

He kissed her and opened the cottage door. She went out with him and watched him go down the street toward the beach.

FROM the Ship Inn at the landward end of the cottages came an old deep-water shellback, one Ted Gillet, who had drifted into the village some years before from parts unknown, a face wreathed in tobacco-stained whiskers. He paused before the girl and squinted comically at the open door of the cottage.

"Airing out the house?" he asked. "Or was you so fussed abart Tom Rivett that you forgot the weather?"

The girl ignored him, staring toward the old church spire, looming weirdly against the heavy, darkening sky, with belated seabirds flying over it.

"Well," pursued Ted, quite undisturbed by her indifference. "Well, I don't blame you for thinkin' a whole lot afore you gets married. I know, because I was married once myself to a lady wot lived on an island in Torres Straits, wot had a father wot was a cannibal. So I knows. But you'll marry Tom yet."

"I won't," she snapped, turning on him.

"Yes, you will. You know what a tide-rip is? Two tides coming together, like the ebb and flood meetin', and spittin' and fussing and raisin' hell, so to speak, until they splices up and goes along together one way, peaceful. Men and women is that way, only they raises a lot more hell. But they ends up by going together—sort of tide-mating, you might call it."

The girl went into the cottage without answering, slamming the door. Ted Gillet grinned, winked and squinted to windward, then he continued on his lurching way.

And in the cottage was the old woman, talking to the wind that was beginning to scream, her chair warm in the glow; whilst the shadows crowded hungrily beyond, like the many lonely years of her life whose gloom could not overcome the cheering memory of her love.

The girl walked softly to the window-seat.

"There's sorrer in the coals," droned the old woman.

The girl looked through the window and saw that it was snowing hard. Impetuously she pulled down the blind and lit the lamp. This made her feel more comfortable. Still craving something to occupy her mind, she made the tea, and afterward put her great-aunt to bed. Then she sat in the rocking-chair and stared into the flames, thinking in the charmingly illogical way of women on the subject so harassing to her, all the time strangely apprehensive of her old relative's prophecy.

The gale grew louder.

How could she marry Tom if he persisted in risking his life? A woman had no right to bring children into the world unless she could take care of them properly. Tom would get drowned, and then the babies would be fatherless. She loved him, but she would not marry him.

She got up suddenly, went to the door, opened it slightly and tried to look out. The gale was drumming between the houses with the accumulated noise of a thousand upper-topsails in their spilling lines, and the swirling snow almost made sight a lost sense. The wind seemed to be trying to gag her, and the door fought her when she shut it. Shivering, she went back to her chair.

She tried to laugh at her fears. Then she tried to make herself believe that Tom was going to mean nothing to her—did he not care more for the life-boat? After all, her aunt might have been wrong; and even if she were right—but every gale did not bring a wreck, and men were saved from some wrecks, without anybody being hurt or drowned, and even if there were a wreck there was nothing that she could do, so she might as well go to bed. She got up from the chair, walked nervously about the room for a while, put more coals on the fire and sat down again.

The old clock in the corner startled her by striking twelve. She had no idea that it was so late, but she felt thankful that so much of the night had passed. Then she trembled at the memory of something that an old man had told her—that all gales reach their height at two o'clock in the morning. She worked the chair closer to the fire, wondering why she felt cold, and suddenly she became acutely conscious that she had been straining her ears all evening, listening for something she did not wish to hear. This, she told herself, was a very foolish thing to do. It would be far better to go to bed.

A squall that seemed intent on tearing

Digitized by Google

the stout old cottage from its foundations howled hungrily, the carpet billowed wildly, and a gust came down the chimney and flung the smoke back into the room. The girl coughed and pushed back her chair, and then she heard it, thudding through the storm—the signal-gun—the call for the life-boat's crew.

Well, there was nothing she could do. In an agony of indecision she wandered about. How untidy the room was. The red-patterned table-cloth was all awry, so she straightened it. Then the ornaments on the mantelpiece were too close to the edge, so she pushed them back. It was a mercy they had not fallen off and been broken.

Tom had refused to promise not to go out in the boat. There was nothing she could do. A man who thought more of strangers on wrecks than he did of the woman who loved him was best forgotten. Besides, the clock needed winding. She had wound it that morning, but the weights seemed far too low. It would be worse if she were married to him. There would be a baby, maybe, asleep. His going would wake it, and it would cry. Surely her aunt had forgotten to dust off the Bible. Perhaps if she pleaded with him he would let some other man take his place.

Again the gun.

The crew would have nearly reached the boat-house, but if she ran she might get there in time. She ought to do something to that window. It was rattling terribly. What would it look like if she got to the boat-house and asked him not to go? Would he say he would go anyway, and show the men by going that he did not think as much about her as he did about the strangers on the wreck?

A shrieking squall whirled madly between the cottages.

The picture on the wall was lopsided. She looked at it thoughtfully, for she prided herself on her housekeeping. But, there was a chance—it wasn't because she loved the man. If she stopped him from going out in the boat she might save his life. She might save his life.

Without thinking of shawl or other protection, she ran to the wind-throbbing door. When she unlatched it it flew at her like a live thing. She had no time to struggle with the fastening of it. The frantically driving snow smashed at her like a solid body of cold. She bent her head and began to fight her way down the street toward the beach and the life-boat house.

HERE and there a light bickered with the gale and then disappeared. Fragments of voices were hurled past her. Her hair seemed to be trying to tear loose. The screaming wind carried her gasps away mockingly. Sometimes she tripped on the cobblestones, but the heft of the gale was so stout that it upheld her. Now and then she groped into the front of a cottage. Dizzily she struggled. Dazed, she reached the end of the street where flying particles of sand mixed with the snow and cut into her face like bits of steel.

She left the cobblestones that had guided her feet and lost her way. She had about a hundred yards to go to reach the boat-house. She tried to face the wind to find her way by it, but it seemed to be blowing sheerly from a dozen different points of the compass.

Two vague forms of men in oilskins struggled past her. To these shapes she called appealingly, but her voice was as impotent as the ghost of an echo, lost between the village and the Milky Way and crying to Eternity for assistance.

Still she struggled onward, as people struggle in strange dreams, half knowing they are dreaming; blinded by the snow and sand, the wind tearing at her clothes like some frenzied degenerate craving her beauty.

Then suddenly she felt that something was shielding her somewhat from the gale and all that came with it. She pushed out her hands and touched the lee side of the boat-house. She groped along the wall till she found the small door on its landward side. Almost exhausted, she opened it and staggered into the tarry-smelling calm of the place.

A single lantern multiplied the shadows, and under it, sitting on a coil of rope, smoking a sooty clay pipe, his work as signal man for the night ended, sat Ted Gillet. The blue-and-white boat that usually filled the house was not there. The large front doors were closed. At the foot of the slip, the girl knew that the carriage of the life-boat was waiting amid the surf for that boat's return.

"Abart a few minutes too late," remarked Ted genially.

Digitized by Google

"Did Tom go in the boat?" she gasped.

"I were just remarking that you were a bit too late to kiss 'im good-by."

The girl made no answer. She found a coil of rope and sat down, shivering.

"There's some oilskin coats 'anging in the corner," suggested Ted.

"What time will the boat be back?"

Mr. Gillet spat reflectively.

"Abart dawn—with luck," he replied.

"Where's the wreck?"

"On the Grinders."

"It's a long row—and all against the wind?"

"Yes, and like as not, because our boat 'as to go dead to wind'ard and two miles further—like as not the St. Anne's boat will get there first."

"What did our men go for, then?"

Ted grinned.

"Rowin's fine hexercise," he said.

"Fine exercise!" cried the girl. "And what about the wives and babies of the men that's in the boat?"

"Sleepin'," hazarded Mr. Gillet.

"Sleeping," she snapped. "Well, I'll never sleep as the wife of a man that thinks more about going out in the life-boat than he does about me."

"Well, you might maybe dream—abart a new hat."

"I wouldn't. How could I if the man I loved was risking his life. But, I won't marry Tom."

"Speakin' of love, I'll tell yer," responded Mr. Gillet pedantically. "And, 'aving been in love myself, I knows. It's this way—it's like being hungry. When you're hungry you think you can eat all the food in the shop, but when you've had enough you don't even bother to set a bit by—throws what's left to the dawg. Being in love's just like being hungry. You carn't think abart nothin' else till you gets your fill of it. And you'll be that way, because you'll marry Tom yet—after raising the devil a bit longer, like them two tides wot I told you abart."

But Mr. Gillet's brand of philosophy was too much for the girl. She crossed the boat-house so as to be as far away from him as possible and sat down on some more rope, disdaining entirely the suggestion regarding oilskin coats.

And in this manner they sat through the remaining hours. Ted smoking, puffing at lengthening intervals—puffing giving place to snorts—another snort—a movement of the diaphragm giving birth to a grunt—the pipe falling to the floor—bad language and the picking of it up. Smoking continued. The girl listening to the storm and staring into the shadows, somewhat fearfully wondering about the ghosts of the dead men of the life-boat who were said to spend their evenings there, thinking of Tom and the problem of their love, and reiterating to herself that it would be wicked to marry him if he persisted in going out in the boat.

In the dark of early morning the fishermen who had no place in the boat began to come there; then the old men straggled in; later, came an occasional woman, with a child in her arms or at her skirts—all of them saying very little to each other. Then the dawn came streakily against a greasy sky that told of more wind, and everybody went outside to watch for the return of the life-boat.

Presently the snow stopped, and there was a little moving of relief among that simple crowd, for, showing now and then on the crests of the waves, then disappearing into their hollows, the boat came, running with her sail set before the gale. And when the sail was furled for the row, stern-first, to the slip, it was seen that she carried no passengers, and the people of the village knew that the St. Anne's boat had rescued the crew of the wreck.

Then the men, and some of the women, went down the spray-drenched slip to help the landing; and one with keen eyes noticed something, and voiced the noticing.

"They're only rowing seven on the port side, and it ain't Tom Rivett that's at the steering oar."

At that it seemed to the girl that the people drew away from her, as if afraid of proffering their homely sympathy; for she felt so very much alone with the gale whipping callously round her. The current of her thinking, which the words had arrested, flowed the faster with wild possibilities born of hope and distressingly illusional. Tom might be taking a rest, lying down on the bottom of the boat. This, as being too fantastical, fled.

But he might have transferred to the St. Anne's boat; they needing help. The haze of this dream vanished. But, at least, he might be only slightly hurt. Maybe a broken arm that prevented his steering, so

Digitized by Google

that he had lain down and was hidden by the gunwale.

Then the men of the life-boat caught the lines thrown to them, and the news came from their deep chests: the news that the St. Anne's boat had reached the wreck first, and had taken off the crew; and the news that the life-boat had capsized, because of a drifting spar that had gotten under her forefoot; and that when she righted as she was built to do, Tom Rivett, the steerer, and the only man not lashed to a thwart, had not come up with her. That they had sought him in the wild sea, in the darkness and the snow, and that they had found no trace of him; and—another good man gone.

THE women had moved toward the girl, but she did not want them near her. Indeed, she hardly saw them; and they, understanding the shock of the sea-grief, did not pester her with attention.

She stood alone staring out at the gray waste of water which held all she knew as dear. And in the moment of her understanding it was given her to know that love's memory can never give the satisfaction of love's inheritance. For her breast craved the baby that could not be—the child of the man who had done his duty. And nothing else could find a place there.

"Out there by the Stanna where the tide comes in first."

The words of her old Aunt Martha came to her like a call.

"Out there by the Stanna where the tide comes in first."

That was where she would find him, dead among the wet seaweed. For the tide had made to the flood and was near high water.

So she began to run toward the north, over the sand-dunes that lay like frozen waves; and as she went the snow-squalls came sweeping over the village again, and the gale gathered itself for another wild day and night.

Almost like a swimmer in a heavy sea she struggled, mounting the crests of the dunes gaspingly, her breath sobbing from her; gathering speed down the inclines to the little valleys, where the wind moaned weirdly through the sparse-growing rushes that showed here and there above the snow-drifts. And spurring her with the fate-unreckoning urge of some battle-hymn was—

"Out there by the Stanna where the tide comes in first."

The Stanna was but a large dune which had in some way managed to work out to the sea, like a harried promontory, a long wedge of blown sand about a hundred and twenty feet high, making an estuary where the tide came in first, and where the drifted seaweed of years marked its coming. Fearful of what she sought, yet craving to find it, the girl fought her way up there, sinking almost to her knees at every step.

At the top, another snow-squall swirled landward with frenzied eagerness, and this blinded her as she tried to stare down into the little bay. Then the snow lifted and gave her sight, and that which her keen young eyes brought to her troubled soul held her with the awe-thrill of the prayer which has been answered, and stirred her with the wonder of a miracle.

For, where the waves were breaking at the line of seaweed and drenching her with spray, sitting on the sand and heedless of the tearing of the gale, was old Martha, and on her lap was the head of Tom Rivett. The wind tossed her words upward incoherently, but the girl gloried in them. Tom must be alive. Her aunt had found him and was talking to him. But how had she managed to get out there, to climb the Stanna, she was so feeble? What did it matter? The greater marvel was that Tom was alive.

And the woman-heart beat to the call, for love's harmony is ever woven out of the discord of difference, and a woman follows a man because he is a man—because she can not lure him from the path of duty to her arms, albeit she generally tries; not because she loves duty the less but because she loves the man the more, and she dreads the danger to him and the waiting till his work is done. So, she "fusses," as Mr. Gillet would put it, just as two tides "fuss" at their mating.

Then the girl ran down the incline of the Stanna crying—"Tom—oh, Tom—Tom!"

She held out her arms rapturously. She reached the level sand. Between the crashing of two great waves the wind lulled for a moment, and the old woman's words shrilled clearly. The girl paused in the understanding of the horror of them, and in that understanding she knew what had drawn her aunt to the place where the tide came in first, and why she held the head of Tom

Digitized by Google

Rivett on her lap, why she smoothed back the wet hair so tenderly and why the words were spoken.

For Martha had so long lived in the memory of her love that it had but needed the touch of the gale to make that memory clothe itself in the vividness of its closing agony; suggestion had stimulated the aged nervous system even as it had robbed her of her appreciation of the Now, and she had stumbled out to the Stanna, believing that it was her wedding morning of sixty years before, to seek the man she loved, and the fates had seen to it that the body of Tom Rivett was there for her to find, so that she might react the finding of her own sweetheart, so that the wind might again toss her mourning about the barren stretch of beach, as it had done in the long ago.

"Wake up, John—don't be lyin' here in the wet an' cold pretending, and scaring your Martha this way."

She kissed the closed eyes and fingered the torn clothing through which the flesh showed, bruised; and the girl knelt down and tried to snatch the body away from her.

"Give him to me, mother—he's mine."

The old woman stared through a film of time at the girl who to her was not yet born.

"He's mine," she said quietly. "Go back to the village and tell the folks that's coming to the weddin' that we'll be there soon."

She tried to push the girl away, but the younger woman grasped her wrists and struggled with her. Tom had been drowned and washed up by the tide. He was her dead. Nobody should take her dead away from her. Out of the past rose a woman whose blood ran red in her veins, a woman who had licked her man's wounds as he lay among the withered ferns of his cave, and who, when he had died, had craved the touch of his dead body as the girl craved the touch of Tom Rivett. And the girl followed the prompting and bared her teeth to fight for what was hers.

So they struggled on the sand about the body that lay there with the tide washing against it. And in that hour the old woman was fully as strong as the girl.

"He's mine—he's mine!" shrieked the girl.

"You fool," the old woman gasped. "You know—he's mine. Go to Father Kelly—tell him—we'll be there. Go—to the—church."

The association of the words—the priest, the church—came throbbing to the girl through the hundreds of thousands of years of the past into which Instinct had dragged her, lifting her as the Angelus lifts the soul when the shadows fall. The priest; the church—ah, God, yes. Tom was dead, her aunt was insane, her world was breaking all about her. That higher instinct, the instinct learned through the pain of growth, which the cave-woman but dimly sensed, that caused her to release her hold of her aunt, to throw herself face down on the sand and sob out her soul in prayer.

And Martha scrambled back to where Tom Rivett lay and took his head on her lap again.

"Come, John, get up—it's our weddin' day, and they'll be waiting."

The girl crossed herself in an agony of resignation, and another snow-squall enveloped them with its bitterness.

"Wake up, John. Don't be pretending."

The girl got to her feet. How terrible it all was. She felt very tired and very lonely, like a little child that is lost. And Father Brennan had been sick in bed a week, but he would know just what to do, and telling him about it would be a comfort. There would be the only help worth while. She would go and tell him. But could she leave her aunt there?

"John, John, are you angry with me about something?"

With the same unusual strength, Martha lifted Tom's head and shoulders to her bosom and began to rock to and fro as if she were nursing a baby, singing the while in a voice which was neither that of an old woman nor a young one. The girl—tensed to that strange mental condition when the ego stands out from the stream of consciousness, aware of things—stood watching.

The tide was beginning to ebb, and only the thin rear-guard of the retreating waves washed against the man's body. But it was this that "took her back to herself," for the memory of the uncouth philosophy of Ted Gillet surged mercifully, so that the arrested thought-stream again flowed. The tide-mating. The girl laughed hysterically. Yes, they had "fussed," but now they would "go along quietly," very quietly, one under the sod and the other under a load of sorrow.

Disjointed fancies whirled through her. Tide-mating: the tide of a Winter gale had

Digitized by Google

thrown her love contemptuously on the sand, and another woman had taken him for hers. Again the savage ache for her own. Again the desire to kill the old woman, if need be, so that she might hug the still body. Again the memory of the only help worth while. She would go to the priest.

Her muscles trembled with the will-effort that controlled them. Then she suppressed the gentlewoman's desire to scream. She would go back to the village, for the church had been comforting its children for nearly two thousand years, and Father Brennan would know what was needed.

But could any comforter remove the clutching at her heart of tiny fingers which would never be? Could any comforter change the great law which says that love's memory can never take the place of love's inheritance?

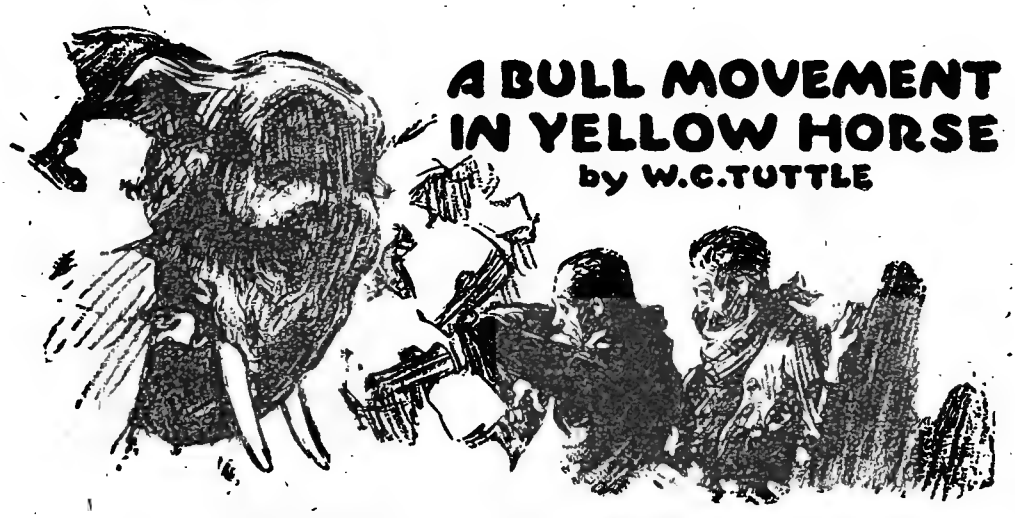
The old woman laid the body on the sand, staring at it and panting with trouble. Carefully she kissed the closed eyes again. She seemed to be thinking. Then suddenly, she threw herself across Tom's chest, shrilling:

"He's dead! Oh, God, he's dead!"

The girl pressed her hands against her bosom and stepped closer. As she did so, Tom opened his eyes and smiled his recognition of her. With a cry of joy she bent her young strength and took him to herself.

"Let him be, let him be—he's mine," sobbed the old woman.

"No-oo, mother," the girl trembled with the glory of it. "No, mother, he's mine."



A BULL MOVEMENT IN YELLOW HORSE

by W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Magpie's Nightbear," "Psychology and Copper," etc.

"COBALT" WILLIAMS and "Slim" Hawkins crawled around on their hands and knees in the road and gazed frowningly at the dust.

"What is she, Slim?" asked Cobalt. "'Pears to me that she's tracks uh some kind."

"Unha," agreed Slim, standing up and brushing the dust off his trousers. "She shore is all yuh said, Cobalt, but I never saw anything like 'em. Looks to me like uh stump had crow-hopped down th' road. Golly, ain't them some feet?"

"As they say in th' army, we will now proceed with caution in skirmish formation," announced Cobalt. "And also keep yore six-gun handy, Slim."

"Can yuh figger out which way she's goin'?" asked Slim.

"These marks don't show no re-markable difference on either end."

"Jist enough for me," replied Cobalt. "They're headin' fer Yaller Hoss, and bein' as that is our ultimate destination we'll jist sort a foller up as it were."

Cobalt hitched up his belt and started off briskly down the road, but Slim didn't seem to be in a hurry. He took out his .45 Colt and twirled the cylinder reflectively.

"Say, Cobalt!" he yelled. "Did yuh ever stop to think that mebby th' critter which

Digitized by Google

made them tracks is so all-fired e-normous that uh six-gun ain't no adequate life insurance a-tall?"

Cobalt stopped and took a fresh chew.

"Mebby she is and mebby she ain't, Slim. I knowed uh Polock who had uh number six foot and he used to buy number twelve boots so he could wear all th' socks he owned to oncet."

"Huh!" snorted Slim. "Yo're oratin' about human bein's. No Polock ever made them tracks. Them was made by uh regular he-animal, and right here I goes on record as havin' said that no animile which makes tracks like them can ever be taken to th' bosom of Slim Hawkins."

"Aw, come on, Slim, let's find out what she is anyway. All this time she's gittin' further and further away. Mebby she's uh harmless beast and we can haze her into Yaller Hoss and have some fun. I'd shore like to show that alleged bad man's town something new. Let's hit th' old highwater trail, Slim. She cuts off about two miles, and mebby we can ambush her, eh?"

Slim agreed and they swung off the road and over a higher trail which was only used in early Spring when the waters of Roaring Lion were on a rampage. They plugged along the trail for about an hour and then dropped down to the road again.

"She ain't come along yet," announced Cobalt, examining the road. "We'll lay down here in th' brush and plug her as she comes out of th' crossin'."

They made themselves comfortable behind some down timber and peered up the road. Pretty soon there was a splash on the further side of the ford and they drew their guns.

"Hup!" yelled a voice. "Hup, you doggoned bull!"

"Bull!" exclaimed Slim. "Cobalt, that may be uh bull— Holy smoke!"

Cobalt jumped to his feet and started to run, but a treacherous vine threw him over a log and Slim sprawled across him. They extricated themselves and sat up. The animal was standing in the middle of the road and the frowsy-looking person on its back was looking them over with astonished eyes. Slim rubbed his eyes and snorted—

"What in —— is that thing?"

"Gentlemen," began the frowsy one, "this is Frederick the First. I may state that he was the star performer of Buckley Brothers Gigantic One-Ring Circus. Him and me are the last of the circus—I'm Buckley."

"Pleased to meet yuh," remarked Cobalt. "And jist about what are yuh doin' here with a elephant?"

"Gentlemen, I am a creature of misfortune. I heard that these mountain towns of the West were starving for a circus, so I routed my aggregation accordingly. The report was erroneous. I finished my tour at Silver Bend. Granite got my lion and trained monkey and Silver Bend took the camel. My clown went to work in the mines at Silver Bend, one of my shell men is in jail at Silver Bend and the other, I have heard, just beat the sheriff to the Canadian border. They gave me and Frederick sixty minutes to get out of Silver Bend and here we are. No money and no friends. Lost all I had, too."

He wiped away a self-sympathizing tear and patted Frederick on the ear with his iron-pointed club.

"Huh," grunted Slim. "What do yuh intend to do now?"

"I hope to sell this noble beast for enough to take me home and make a fresh start."

Cobalt walked around the elephant, keeping a safe distance from its swinging trunk. Frederick was a small elephant, but to Cobalt and Slim it was of massive proportions.

"Sell him, eh?" mused Slim aloud.

"Who in —— would want to buy uh thing like that?" inquired Cobalt. "Nobody in these parts wants to start uh circus, I reckon. Ain't he good fer nothin' but circusin'?"

"Gentlemen," stated the circus man in his best spieling tones, "this animal is good for a thousand things. He can lift and place timbers it would take a dozen men to move. He can move or shift a loaded wagon that six horses could not start. As a means of conveyance he is supreme. Why, he could carry a ton of ore out of these hills as easily as you could carry a lunch-pail. Slow and sure-footed, gentlemen, and a great pet. Pet? Why, gentlemen, I may well say that he's affectionate to a startling degree. I hate to sell him, but I need the money."

Slim sat down on a log and rolled a smoke. He grinned at Cobalt and blew a cloud of smoke towards the elephant.

"How much?" he asked.

"Well, my friends, Frederick the First is valued at five thou——"

"Unha," interrupted Slim, "I know; but

Digitized by Google

what I asked yuh is how much yuh want fer it?"

"Give it uh name," agreed Cobalt.

"Make me a price," replied the wary Buckley. "I can't give him away, you know."

Slim sized the animal up with an appraising eye.

"Well, it 'pears to me thisaway. Uh burrow is worth about twenty dollars and this brute is about as big as ten burrows. Say, two hundred dollars, eh?"

"But this is an elephant!" exclaimed Buckley.

"Don't blame us," replied Cobalt. "We never ordered elephants."

"Two hundred will take me to New York," mused Buckley. "Well, I'll let him go for two hundred," he declared, sliding to the ground.

"How do yuh operate this wrinkled bronk?" asked Slim, after the money had disappeared in Buckley's pocket.

Buckley explained as well as he could.

Slim grinned and felt of the iron brad in the club.

"As I gets it, this 'Hup' means anything from 'Good mornin', Freddy,' to 'Whoa, yuh Injy-rubber pile driver,' eh?"

"Just about," replied Buckley. "Where can I find the nearest railroad station?"

"Well," replied Cobalt, "yuh take that trail down th' crick until yuh comes to uh big flat about six miles from here and then turn due east fer uh bout uh mile and you'll come to uh water-tank. They'll stop fer uh flag."

"Say, what did yuh send him 'way off that way fer?" asked Slim, after Buckley had gone. "Yaller Hoss is about six mile closer."

"Huh!" snorted Cobalt. "Me and you and Freddy are goin' to Yaller Hoss. Between here and there we can fix up uh story that will make 'em all sit up. Punch that animule over to that pile uh down timber and we'll ride him double. Doggone, his clothes do need pressin' plumb bad. Two hundred, Slim! Why, he's worth that jist to look at. Ain't nothin' like him ever been in these hills before, and when we rides him into Buck Masterson's saloon, won't there be something doing, Slim? I asks yuh, won't there?"

"Somethin' doin' is right," agreed Slim. "They'll shore date time from today. Hup, yuh doggone bull!"

BUCK MASTERSON grinned at the five cards in his hand and shoved in a stack of blues.

Pete Gonyer toyed with his chips and frowned at the jack-pot.

"Yuh out on uh limb again, Buck?" he queried.

"He'll let yuh know fer about twenty-five dollars, Pete," laughed Art Miller, who had the next "say" in the pot. "Go on, Pete. Play 'em high and sleep in th' street."

Andy Johnson yawned and threw his cards on the table.

"Doggone it, I ain't held uh hand all day. I'm tired uh poker anyway. Wish something would happen in this man's town fer uh change."

His wish was partly gratified, for at that moment the front door flew open and an Indian galloped through the room, with his blanket streaming out behind him like a striped comet, and as he tore through the back door he yelled:

"Hy-ak! Diaub chahko!"

Rickey Henderson, the bartender, dropped a glass of spirits and climbed on top of the bar. "What did he say, Buck?" he gasped.

Buck threw back his head and laughed.

"I reckon Texas Charley has been hittin' th' lemon extract again. He yelled fer us to run 'cause th' devil is comin'. Charley's gittin' too danged thick with that Chink cook at Dutch Fred's. Them lemon jags are apt to make an Injun——"

Came a loud crash of splintering boards out in front of the saloon and the false front wabbled dangerously. The doors were built wide enough to drive a team through, but happened to be closed and latched. Suddenly they bent inward as from a great weight and the lock spinned off across the room.

"Hup!" yelled a voice from the outside. "Hup, yuh doggoned bull!"

Masterson tried to slide his chair back to get up, but the rest of the players, frantic to get out of the way of those bulging walls, climbed over the table and fell on Buck in a heap.

"Hup!"

Splinter! Smash! The doors gave way and in surged Frederick the First, with Cobalt and Slim lying flat on his back to keep from being swept off.

"Hey!" yelled Masterson, trying to pull the overturned table on top of himself for

Digitized by Google

protection. "Why don't somebody shoot it?"

The rest of the crowd seemingly got started at once like a flying wedge of football formation and all hit the back door at the same time. Unluckily for them the door opened inside and no one seemed inclined to back away and give the door a chance.

Frederick leaned against the bar and over it went. Just in time, too, because Rickey Henderson was lying behind it trying to put a couple of cartridges into the muzzle end of a shotgun.

"Help!" yelled Rickey as the avalanche hit him, but subsided after a few weak groans.

Frederick the First hated whisky. He hated men who drank it, and even the scent of alcohol threw him into a panic. A stream of it flowed from under the overturned bar and eddied around his front feet. He swung his trunk over it a few times and trumpeted loud enough to shake the building.

"Whoa, you son-of-a-gun!" yelled Cobalt, as the elephant lurched forward and reached for Masterson's booted leg. "Look out, Buck!"

Masterson twisted like an eel and slid off down the room and under the antiquated pool table, while Frederick whirled the boot back and forth over his head. Suddenly he let it fly in the direction of the tongue-tied mob at the back door. It glanced off Art Miller's head and banged against the wall.

"Somebody shoot it," quavered Masterson from under the table. "Go back, yuh son of uh sea cook, or I'll shoot!" his voice finished in a shrill crescendo, and he waved a six-shooter over the farther end of the table.

"Bang!" His first shot hit the swinging oil lamp over Slim's head and deluged him with kerosene. The next one thudded into the armor plating of Frederick's shoulder. The elephant never flinched, but his little eyes grew redder.

"M-m-m-m-make him behave, Slim," quavered Cobalt. "He'll wreck this hull blamed town. Lemme down."

The elephant moved ponderously down the room and the rough pine flooring snapped and groaned under his tread. He turned to the pool table and swept all the balls into a heap with his trunk.

"Woosh!" he announced, as he gathered one of the balls in the loop of his trunk.

Bing! He threw his trunk forward and drove one of those pool balls through the door over Pete Gonyer's head, and then reached for another.

"Duck!" yelled Pete, and the whole mob piled up on the floor.

Another and another smashed against the wall until five had been thrown. The elephant paused and shook his head.

"Look out, he's comin'!" yelled some one, and the bunch scrambled for points of safety.

The elephant ignored the scrambling crowd and backed off a few steps.

"Hrr-r-rump!" he announced, and bowing his neck he started straight for the back door.

Buck Masterson had not builded well. That no cyclones or earthquakes had been anticipated by the builders was attested by the fact that when Frederick the First hit that door he not only took the door but the greater part of the rear of the saloon as well.

"Woosh!" he grunted, and moved forward.

Cobalt and Slim were swept off in the demolition and lit running.

"Where yuh goin'?" panted Cobalt, running and looking back at the elephant trying to get rid of the door-casing.

"Goin' away while th' goin' is good," replied Slim, ducking around the corner of a corral. "Git behind that shed, Cobalt! Hell's goin' to break loose pretty soon. Mama mine, didn't he make uh mess! Look out, here they come!"

Pete Gonyer and Andy Johnson came galloping around the corner with a gun in each hand.

"Which way did they go?" yelled Pete. "See anything of them, Buck?"

Masterson ran across the street to where the horses were hitched at a rack, and Art Miller was at his heels.

"Come on!" yelled Masterson. "They can't git far, and doggone 'em, I want to git my rope on that pair. Bust up my house, will they!"

"Look out!" roared Rickey Henderson, weaving across the street and leaving a trail of bad whisky, torn clothes and profanity.

But he yelled too late. Frederick the First was on the job again. Unable to part company with that door-casing he ambled around the corner and came bumping over towards the hitch-rack.

Digitized by Google

MASTERSON'S mount, a Roman-nosed roan outlaw, took one look at the elephant, and sun-fished on the space of a saddle blanket. Caught unawares, Masterson described a parabola over Wick Smith's wire fence and lit sitting down.

Art Miller's latigo busted and left him on his right ear in the middle of the road. Gonyer's and Johnson's horses saw the elephant at the same instant and collided in midair. Pete's horse turned a somersault, spilling Pete under the board sidewalk. Andy dropped his reins and pulled leather as his buckskin pitched off down the street and around the corner. Rickey Henderson forgot the elephant in the excitement.

"Haw! Haw!" He doubled up with mirth. "Masterson shore went high wide and handsome. Wonder if—Wow!"

Frederick had sneaked up and playfully tried to wrap his trunk around Rickey's neck. Rickey dropped his two guns and galloped wildly up the street out of sight.

"We got to catch that danged chunk uh animated rubber," announced Slim, peeking around the corner. "He's got that door off his neck now. Come on, Cobalt."

"Not fer mine," replied Cobalt with conviction. "Not any a-tall. I hereby renounces all claim to li'l Freddy."

"Aw, come on, Cobalt. Doggone, there he goes towards th' post-office! Come on, we got to head him off. We can't let him assault th' Gover'ment."

Frederick was sizing up the little post-office as Slim ranged alongside.

"Hup!" yelled Slim, but Frederick had different views.

Miss Harris, the post-mistress, faded, slim and forty, and much admired by Buck Masterson, opened the door of the post-office and glanced out. It was only a glance and it encountered the waving trunk of Frederick. She yelped once and a second later there was a flash of petticoats out the back door and Miss Harris faded out of the picture.

The front of the office was built with a porch, a post on each corner and one in the middle. To Frederick they were something to play with.

"Look out!" yelled Cobalt.

"Hup!" shouted Slim, and raced away just in time to miss being pinned under the falling timber.

The elephant backed away and looked satisfied.

"If I could only git on his back I could handle him," wailed Slim. "He's so danged big he can't see us on th' ground."

"I'll give yuh uh boost," volunteered Cobalt.

Slim reached up on the elephant's back as far as he could. Cobalt took hold of Slim's left foot and boosted—but not far. Frederick reached around, grabbed Cobalt by the slack of his trousers and threw him twenty feet away and Slim fell flat in the dust.

"Doggone yer hides, I'll show yuh!" yelled a voice, and Slim looked up into the scratched face of Buck Masterson.

Buck glared at Slim for a moment and then glanced at the post-office.

"My Gawd!" he yelped. "Tore down th' post-office and—oh, Mis' Harris! Mis' Harris!"

He ran over and started to lift up the broken boards. He never noticed that it was only the porch. Slim got up, ignoring Masterson's wails and hobbled off down the street in the wake of Frederick. Cobalt limpingly brought up the rear.

"Sufferin' Moses!" groaned Cobalt. "He took up th' slack uh my pants so danged sudden that he busted my wishbone. Let him go, Slim."

"We ain't stoppin' him none, are we?" replied Slim peevishly. "Go round and head him off, Cobalt."

"Not me. If I attacks at all it will be from th' rear. That trunk uh his'n is too previous. Look, Slim, he's headin' fer th' crick. Mebby he acted thataway 'cause he was dry."

The elephant waded knee-deep in the little creek and began to drink.

"Now's yer chance to git on his back and control him," whispered Cobalt.

Slim sneaked along the bank above the elephant and slid on to his back. Frederick never moved.

"Come on, Cobalt, he's plumb docile now."

Cobalt sidled up the bank and slid on.

"It's all over but th' shoutin'," gleefully announced Slim.

"By golly, we shore——"

Slim's words were cut off by a stream of dirty water which hit him full in the mouth with terrific force, and the next instant he and Cobalt were reposing in the creek, while Frederick splashed out the other side and headed for town.

Digitized by Google

They sat there and pawed the mud out of their faces and looked foolishly at each other. Suddenly they heard the thump of horses' hoofs and then the voice of Andy Johnson remarked:

"They ain't here, Pete. They must be back up-town some place. I reckon we'll find 'em where we find that blasted beast. Better leave th' bronks here and go on foot, eh?"

"Reckon that's right, Andy. Them bronks shore don't kumtuks that animule. By golly, them fellers shore have got uh bunch uh trouble comin' to them, eh, Andy?"

They dropped their reins and their voices died off in the distance as they hobbled off toward town and Frederick the First.

Slim looked at Cobalt for a minute and then broke into a wide smile.

"Th' Good Book says that th' ravens fed Elijah, Cobalt, and I takes it that them hosses are uh heap opportune, eh?"

They crawled out of the creek bed and peered over the bank. There was considerable shouting going on up-town, but their view of the action was obstructed.

Slim walked over and caught both horses

"Take yore pick, Cobalt," he announced. "An elephant is uh hy-iu animile; but bein' brought up with ordinary critters and not bein' finicky a-tall I nacherally prefers uh common or garden variety of outlaw bronks."

Cobalt chose the roan, and they swung around and raced off across the sage-covered flat away from Yellow Horse.

Behind them they heard a muffled crash and the faint report of a gun as they raced out of hearing distance.

At midnight they swam their horses across Little Wind river and entered another state. As they halted on the opposite bank to roll a smoke and give the horses a breathing-spell Slim turned in his saddle and gazed back toward Yellow Horse.

"Hoss thieves and outlaws, Cobalt. That's me and you. Outlawed by uh danged Injy-rubber ox that don't know Whoa from Hup! But, Cobalt, he was all that he was represented. He shore could move things."

Cobalt shifted uneasily in his saddle.

"Unha. He shore was, and did, Slim. Also he was affectionate to uh startling degree. I'm goin' to walk uh ways."

II

SLIM HAWKINS yawned heavily and tried to pull the covers closer around his chin and, after an effort or two, sat up with a look of wonderment on his face. He rubbed a long, freckled hand across his prominent nose and grinned foolishly.

He contemplated the snoring individual at his side for a few seconds and then flipped a small rock in the general direction of the recumbent form.

"Wake up, Cobalt!" he yelled.

Cobalt drew a dusty hand across his mouth and woke up with a sneeze.

"Doggone it, yuh don't need to paralyze uh feller with uh rock to wake him up," he protested. "I wasn't— say, Slim, what th' —huh!"

Slim grinned weakly and made a sweeping gesture with his hand.

"Here we are, Cobalt. Right here in th' corral with th' rest of th' jackasses. Them two mules and me and you jist makes uh quartette. We will now proceed to sing, 'Lips which touch liquor——' "

"Aw, let me think!" wailed Cobalt.

"Think? Say, if you had any thinks comin', why didn't yuh cut some uh them loose last night? Golly, they shore have got some whisky in this man's town. I never in my whole life—say, we must 'a' been like uh pair uh timber Willies last night. Ugh! Do yuh remember about bein' put to bed in this corral, Cobalt?"

Cobalt shook his head wearily and picked absently at the wool on his chaps.

"I've heerd tell," murmured Slim, "that when uh patient gits to th' point where he picks at th' covers they goes right out and buys him uh nice li'l shiny, wooden box."

"Funny, ain't yuh!" groaned Cobalt. "Mama mine, this is th' worst room I ever had. My mouth tastes like uh Flathead Injun had jist moved out. I can't remember nothin', Slim—that is, I can't remember nothin' that happened last night. I know I dreamed about that danged elephant again. That makes three nights hand runnin' that I've chased Li'l Freddy in my sleep, and I don't reckon it's lucky to do uh thing like that."

"I'll bet she was some dream," yawned Slim. "That tanglefoot liniment which they sells fer whisky in this man's town

Digitized by Google

would make uh feller dream of— Oh, Jerusalem my happy home! Look!"

Cobalt was reaching for the fence as an assistance to getting to his feet, when Slim's exclamations hit his ear-drums. He turned his head, got one good look and slid weakly back into the dust.

"Buck Masterson!" exploded Slim.

Cobalt merely groaned and rubbed at the six-days' growth of black stubble on his pudgy face and shuddered as he gazed at the rangy, dust-covered individual at the corral gate. Masterson held a six-shooter in his right hand, while with his left he slapped his worn sombrero against his leather chaps to remove the dust.

His grizzled hair was unkempt and his mustache hung like a pair of discouraged buck tails on each side of his crooked mouth. A half-smile chased across his face and broke into a thousand tiny wrinkles at each side of his eyes as he sized up the pair lounging in the corral dust.

"You shore got to come and git it," he announced slowly.

"Unha," agreed Slim wonderingly. "I reckon we shore do."

"Come and git it," he repeated.

"You go git it," implored Cobalt. "I ain't a-feelin' spry, and it only takes one to——"

"Shut up!" roared Masterson, waving the gun. "None uh that funny stuff! Are yuh comin' to git it?"

Slim grinned weakly.

"Jist throw it over this way, Buck. Let down th' hammer so she won't go off."

"Say, yuh danged menagerie mutt, I ain't talkin' about no gun. I'm oratin' about elephants—e-l-e-f-a-n-t-s, *sabe?*"

"Slimmie," wailed Cobalt, "he means Frederick th' First. He wants us to come and git it! Mama mine, he invades th' sanctity of our bood-wah jist to ask us to come and git that—thing!"

"'Quoth th' raven, Nevermore,'" quoted Slim. "Buck, I asks yuh as mason to mason——"

"Not any a-tall," stated Buck, with an air of finality. "You and yore pardner in crime are in bad over my way and even with th' hull community, includin' greasers and Chinks, to back up my play I shore hates to shoot yuh down in cold blood, but —again I asks yuh in uh ladylike manner and without rancor in my heart, are yuh comin' to git it?"

Cobalt spilled the tobacco out of his cigarette for the fifth time and turned to Slim.

"Do we go?"

Slim climbed to his feet and hitched up his belt.

"Oh, well, of course, if that's th' way yuh feels about it, Buck, we'll go—shore. But I jist wants to call yore attention to one thing, Buck. There is times in every man's life when circumstances git th' best uh him. Sometimes it's booze, sometimes it's women and sometimes it's th' pasteboards. Now if yuh asks me I'll re-mark that I'm willin' to be quoted to th' extent that I believes elephants is circumstances too."

"Uh course I don't advertise myself as th' 'Greatest and Only Elephant Remover in th' Universe,' but as uh pair uh 'Go Getters' I reckon me and Cobalt are some distinguished."

"Say, Buck," drawled Cobalt, "how about them hosses? I shore ain't goin' back to face no judge and jury."

Buck grinned widely and showed the need of a dentist in Yellow Horse.

"Not any, Cobalt. I reckon you fellers saved Andy Johnson and Pete Gonyer uh heap of explanations, 'cause th' next day th' real owners uh them bronks showed up with uh deputy sheriff."

"Frederick been behavin' right well?" asked Slim.

"As uh perfect gentleman I don't reply a-tall. I only talks two languages—English and profane—and English won't no ways describe what I'd have to tell yuh. All we ask is fer you fellers to come up there and take it away. We won't even ask yuh where yo're goin'. I'm representin' Yaller Hoss in this matter, and while you fellers are to blame fer th' advent of that animule, I'm here to state that uh memorial shaft will be raised right in th' middle uh Main Street with yore names carved thereto th' minute yuh can persuade that—huh—animule to pilgrim away to parts unknown."

"Buck," laughed Slim, "right in th' center uh th' street looks good, but I'm figgerin' that ain't no place a-tall fer uh double funerial."

Cobalt cleared his throat.

"My opinions edzactly. I ain't in favor uh no memorial. We're jist uh plain pair uh 'Go Getters' and all we ask is yore kind regards and—Buck, there ain't no cause fer that six-gun. Me and Slim gave ours to th' bellboy fer turnin' out th' lights last night."

Digitized by Google

"Well, you know how Yaller Hoss stands and all we ask is peace. I'll borrow uh pair uh bronks from old man Doolittle and we'll leave here pronto. We can't git there none too soon, 'cause my fair city ain't noways what you'd call satisfied in th' society of that hunk uh armor-plated deviltry."

IT WAS noon the next day when the trio rode into Yellow Horse and turned their tired horses over to a scared-looking stable-man. Slim glanced up and down the street and then turned to Buck.

"She don't look natural a-tall, some way. What's th' matter? There ain't uh hoss on th' street and nobody in sight. Is somebody bein' buried today, Buck?"

"Not yit!" snorted Buck. "Do yuh notice that my saloon's got uh barb-wire fence across th' front? Notice that there ain't no ve-randa on th' post-office nor on Wick Smith's store, and that th' town pump has been tore up by th' roots? Did yuh happen to notice that th' hitchin'-rack's done vanished and that th' hay-scales has done weighed its last load? Remember that nice white picket-fence which Mis' Wayland had around her candy-store? Gone! Tore up by that zoological monstrosity!"

"Mama mine!" declared Cobalt. "Freddy shore leaves his trade-mark. What's that buckboard doin' on top of Jimmy Peyton's shack?"

"Doin'!" yelped Buck. "It's bein' saved! That beast tried three times to drag that wagon through Smith's front door, but it was too wide. Me and Jimmy sneaked it away from th' brute while said beast was eatin' up old man Anderson's load uh baled hay. We h'ists her up there fer safety."

Slim removed his sombrero and ran his forefinger thoughtfully over the snake-skin band.

"People have queer tastes sometimes. I observes that Sam Holt's done moved his cow-shed into his front yard."

"Gosh, that's right!" exclaimed Buck. "I'll bet——"

"Hey!" yelled an excited, high-pitched voice, and a tousled-headed youngster, who appeared across the street, beckoned to the trio. "Come on over here! They've got it locked up in your stable, Mr. Masterson, and they're afraid it ain't goin' to stay put."

"Comin' right over, sonny!" yelled Masterson, and then to Slim: "I'm glad they got it locked up. We chased it into th' corral before I left and th' danged stump-puller went all th' way around and removed all th' posts. Come on and git it now."

They crossed the street and found all of the male inhabitants of Yellow Horse perched on a high board fence, cussing and discussing ways and means of hampering the proclivities of Frederick.

"I'm bettin' two to one that he don't stay put fer five minutes more," stated Pete Gonyer. "Anybody want to take uh chance? Also I wagers even money that in case he does emerge, th' north side of th' shack will hit th' ground before th' south side does."

The crowd was too interested in the trembling cow-shed to notice the entrance of Slim and Cobalt, until the tousled-headed kid shinned up the fence and yelled, "There they are!" and pointed them out.

There was a tense moment as the crowd recognized them, and several hands strayed unconsciously toward pistol-butts. Masterson recognized the symptoms and stepping forward threw up both hands.

"No gun-play, folks! I knows how yuh feels, but this ain't no time fer such petty revenge as shootin'. These fellers has my assurance that all we wants uh them is th' immediate removal of this animated house-wrecker.

"Bein' acquainted with th' habits and customs uh elephants they has assured me that they will remove it with wisdom and despatch. Jist sit tight and let them proceed with their chore."

Slim tightened up his belt and cleared his throat.

"Who put this elephant in that shed?" he asked in a "Who-gives-this-bride-away?" tone.

"Andy Johnson and Pete Gonyer did!" yelled the kid gleefully. "Pete hit it with a rock and then run into the stable and climbed out of the hay window, and Andy shut th' door behind it."

"Ain't you fellers got any sense?" asked Cobalt in an aggrieved tone. "Hit it with uh rock, eh? Anybody with sense would—say, Slim, did yuh ever hear th' like?"

"Awful," agreed Slim. "But, Cobalt, yuh got to make allowances fer downright ignorance. Yuh see they never studied elephantology like we have and yuh can't expect them to——"

"Look out!" yelled Rickey Henderson.

Digitized by Google

"That wall is due to bust in uh minute."

Slim ran over to the wall with the least bulge, put his mouth to a crack and yelled—

"Hup!"

The boards creaked and groaned as they settled back to their former position.

"Uh little knowledge is all that's needed," stated Cobalt, swelling out his chest and leering at the crowd on the fence.

"Well, go on and git him out," growled Wick Smith. "Jist makin' him quit tryin' to come out through uh knot-hole don't prove nothin' to me."

Slim beckoned to Cobalt and whispered in his ear—

"Stand ready to slide when I opens th' door."

"Haw! Haw!" exploded Art Miller from the highest part of the fence. "I done shot that brute six times this mawnin' with uh .44 and I don't believe he even heard th' noise. I'm in favor uh usin' dynamite on him while he's in that shack. All in favor uh dynamite signify by yellin'— Wow! Here he comes!"

All of which was very true. At that moment there came a crash of splintering wood, a cloud of dust and splinters, and Frederick the First was free. Not only free but coming straight for the extemporized grand stand.

"Whoop!" yelled Slim as he whirled on his boot-heel. He took two long strides and cleared that six-foot fence by the simple method of placing both hands on top and turning a complete hand-spring. The leap was a world-beater but the landing was disastrous.

Pete Gonyer and Art Miller had tangled in mid-air as they jumped and as they landed Slim's pin-wheel turn was finished and he lit squarely on top of them with a jolt that deprived all three of them of their quota of atmosphere.

Slim was the first to recover. He saw the situation at a glance. Pete's face was twitching and grimacing as he tried to pump air into his depleted lungs, while Art, on the bottom of the heap, was pounding his spurred heels in the dust and making queer little chuckling noises with his mouth.

Slim got up and raced around the corner. He was badly shaken up and desired to limp more than anything on earth, but he knew that there were healthier locations for him than that special spot when Pete and Art recovered.

"Mister, he's got your pardner," informed the kid, from around the corner of the blacksmith shop. The kid's face was so white that his freckles didn't show and his eyes were as large as saucers as he pointed up the alley. "He's got him I tell you! Meby he's stood on him by this time."

Slim limped up the alley and behind the saloon.

"'Got him' is right," he groaned.

Cobalt was on his belly in the dust, and over him stood the elephant. Its trunk was playfully tapping Cobalt's bare head and at every tap Cobalt dug his nose in the dust and squeaked—

"Don't!"

"Are yuh alive, pardner?" panted Slim.

"Jist barely," whispered Cobalt, and ducked into the dust again and groaned.

The crowd which had scattered far and wide began to drift back and peer around the corners. Some of the bolder ones sauntered out in sight but were ready for another stampede in case the elephant made another foray.

The elephant was getting nervous. He would lift one foot at a time and, after waving it around slowly, would place it back in the exact spot it had previously occupied.

"If he ever sits down I'm uh goner," stated Cobalt in a whisper.

"He does jist that very thing," remarked Rickey Henderson, cheerfully from the cover of a pile of beer-kegs. "Yesterday I seed him stand on his hind laigs jist like uh dog and then sit down plumb hard."

Suddenly Slim had a bright idea.

"Listen: I saw an elephant do that once and he was plumb slow in settin' down. Now, when I walks up and yells 'Hup!' you jist rolls over fast and gits clear, *sabe?*"

"Not any!" declared Cobalt. "Let 'im alone, Slim. I'm alive now and this elephant can't stand here all day. He's got to move some time, and if I has anything to say about it, he moves of his own free will."

"This thing has got to stop right now!" yelled Buck Masterson, coming down the alley with a sawed-off shotgun in his hands. "Step back while I perforate that flat-footed rubber devil! Git back, Slim! That was my stable and doggone it——"

Slim stepped between Buck and the elephant and threw up his hands.

"Don't do it, Buck! Shoot th' beast if

Digitized by Google

yuh must, but not while my bunkie is sleepin' in its bosom. I'm uh heap wise to them scatter-bore riot-guns, and besides it wouldn't even tickle that animule. Put that gun down and we'll try uh little moral——"

Slim's voice broke suddenly. Frederick the First had slowly wandered away from Cobalt, while every one was watching Masterson's actions, and dropped his trunk over Slim's shoulder.

Slim's face turned a pasty white and he froze in his tracks. The trunk traveled slowly, caressed the back of his neck, tickled his ears and then came to a stop on his right shoulder. Slim reached up automatically and stroked it. The elephant moved up closer and began to explore Slim's pockets. The crowd watched open-mouthed for Slim's annihilation.

"Plumb docile," announced Cobalt in awestricken tones.

Slim came back to earth and grinned foolishly.

"All yuh got to do is to use uh little brains. You snake-hunters don't know nothin' about elephants. Yuh can't handle uh beast like this with six-shooters and riot-guns."

He stroked Frederick's trunk and reached for his cigarette-papers.

"Pore li'l ol' Freddy. Did they abuse yuh? Yuh got to excuse ignorance in some folks and——"

Frederick suddenly whipped his trunk away from Slim's shoulder and began backing up. His little eyes were searching the ground and his ears flopped like a pair of loose sails.

Faster and faster he backed until he hit the fenc e with a crash. The force of the impact turned him around and he surged the whole length of that fence, taking it all with him.

Heretofore he had always stopped to consider his handiwork, but this time he merely tossed his trunk and trumpeted wildly as he crashed over the fence and weaved down the street.

The crowd, with the exception of Slim and Cobalt, had broken for the street as the elephant began backing.

"Pack rat!" croaked Cobalt. "Pack rat jist came out of that old stable and scared seven kinds uh delerious delight out uh that big hunk uh rubber! What do yuh know about that?"

CAME a sound of galloping horses and bouncing wagon from the street and a chorus of "Whoa! Whoa!" and then a murmuring of excited voices.

Slim listened for a moment and then grabbed Cobalt by the sleeve.

"Let's git a-goin'! Gol darn this town anyway!"

They slipped around behind the demolished stable and started to sneak behind Wick Smith's store, but Fate in the person of Masterson met them at the corner, and fate held a leveled riot-gun.

"No yuh don't! I was layin' fer jist some sich move. That—huh—elephant hit th' street jist in time to meet judge Simpkins with uh load uh hay. Th' judge is plumb busted up and his wagon is in keepin' with th' rest of this town. I reckon th' hosses are in Canada by this time. Jist turn around and mosey up th' street."

Slim and Cobalt made no protest. Men seldom protest at the muzzle of a riot-gun. At the center of the street Slim stopped and removed his hat.

"I reckon you'll erect that shaft right here, eh, Buck? Nice location."

Buck started to reply but at this juncture the crowd surged out of Smith's store and over to where Buck stood with his captives.

"Shall we hang 'em?" asked Art Miller, and this was a signal for each individual to express his opinion as to the ultimate fate of the pair.

"If yuh asks me, I favors hangin' uh heap," stated Pete Gonyer, rubbing his still aching side.

"Git yore dirty hands off me, Pete!" roared Slim. "I don't let no hoss-thief pass sentence on me."

"How's th' judge?" interrupted Buck.

"Still unconscious," some one replied.

"We sent to Sagebrush fer Doc Ames," announced Andy Johnson.

"We can't do uh thing till he comes, and I don't reckon he can git here before ten o'clock tonight."

"Tell yuh what we better do," suggested Smith. "We'll lock 'em in that old dobie shack uh mine fer th' night. There's uh good padlock on th' door and th' window ain't big enough fer uh monkey to crawl through. We'll keep 'em till we sees if th' judge is goin' to pull through, eh?"

The crowd received the suggestion with acclaim, and formed a triumphal procession

Digitized by Google

to the aforementioned shack. It was a relic of the days before lumber came to Yellow Horse, and consisted of one room about ten by fifteen feet, low ceiling, and the one window was high up on the wall and was evidently used more as a loophole or ventilator. On the floor was nothing except some old straw and the dust of years.

Into this they were thrust and the door padlocked behind them. The crowd then wandered back to slake their thirst and await the coming of the doctor.

"Well, we're safe from Freddy," stated the optimistic Slim, after the crowd had gone.

"Unha," agreed Cobalt doubtfully. "I heard Andy tell Pete that Frederick had jist kept on goin'. I reckon that animule must 'a' had uh right smart of uh yaller streak, Slim. I wonder what they can do to us in case th' judge don't recover?"

"It ain't what they can do to us, Cobalt, it's what will they do to us? I'm sorry for th' judge."

"Then yore sorrow's plumb misplaced, Slim. If yuh got any sorrow to waste jist smear uh little close to home. Remember in case he does survive he sits on our case, *sabe?*"

"This is some hy-iu jail," remarked Slim, after examining all the walls and ceiling. "That window ain't big enough to send yore regrets out of. Golly, it's gittin' dark. Give me yore smokin'."

They consumed several cigarettes before it got so dark that Cobalt had to light a match to look at his watch.

"Eight-thirty," he announced. "I reckon that doctor will be due in about—say, what in thunder's shuttin' th' little light out of our window?"

Slim jumped to his feet and strode over to the wall.

"Holy mackerel, it's that—look, Cobalt! It's Frederick! Look out, he's tryin' to come in th' window!"

The elephant slid his trunk over the inside of the window and sniffed at the dust-covered walls. Suddenly his trunk stiffened and he began to pull back.

Came a muffled grunt and the side of that dobie shack for a space of about six feet wide parted company with the roof, and a cloud of dust almost suffocated the captives.

"Woosh!" grunted Frederick happily, and bunted his broad head against the wall next to the door.

At last he had found a wall that wasn't full of nails and splinters, and the fact seemed to please him immensely.

Squsht Boofl The entire front wall caved in and the ceiling sagged.

Obeying the same impulse, Slim and Cobalt sprang to their feet and dashed out of the gaping walls as far as possible from the elephant and headed for the open country. They ran as far as their lungs allowed, rested a few seconds and then repeated the performance, and stopped not until far from Yellow Horse.

"Where—goin'?" panted Cobalt. "Let's go—Curlew."

"Not any," wheezed Slim. "We ain't got no horses and this—huh—flat country ain't safe a-tall. We'll go—Mica."

"Aw, we can't," protested Cobalt. "We can't travel that trail in th' dark. Golly, we'd fall off! Why, Slim, there's places on that trail where it's uh million miles to th' bottom!"

"We'll take uh chance. It's uh cinch they can't foller us, and th' moon will be up pretty soon, Cobalt. Come on! Let's git a-goin' and leave this flat country."

Cobalt protested every step of the way but followed Slim to the foot of the trail. This trail had never been popular with the cattle men on account of its narrowness, and was seldom used except by foot travelers. In places a misstep would plunge the unlucky one for five hundred feet straight into the bristling tops of spruce and fir—missing that the jagged rocks of Lost Creek were anything but inviting.

They toiled around the worst part of the trail and sat down to rest. The moon flooded the valley below them and showed a silhouette of the Pitchfork Range beyond, but they had little inclination to contemplate the majesty of the night.

"Lookin' back over my life I can't say she's been uh howling success," mused Cobalt aloud. "I ain't never done anything that was exactly wrong, but someway I jist can't never seem to be—well, one who was also there, Slim."

"Me and you both," agreed Slim dolefully. "Seems like I can't seem to make people appreciate my efforts. Now, you and me has always done our dangedest, Cobalt, and what do we git fer it? We've always tried to do our best and I can't

Digitized by Google

remember uh place yet where we ain't had to leave in such uh hurry that we ain't had uh chance to say— What th'——!"

They jumped to their feet.

"What is it, Slim?" quavered Cobalt. "Am I seein' things or——"

"It was," stated Slim with conviction. "Wait till he makes that last turn—if he can."

Below them on the narrow trail a huge shadow seemed to crawl along slowly. At times it would halt as if undecided, and then move forward. Suddenly there was a rattle of loose stones, a muffled squeal and the shadow vanished.

Slim turned to Cobalt and removed his hat. "*Requiescat in pace,*" he murmured.

"Me and you both," agreed Cobalt. "What does that mean, Slim?"

"That," replied Slim, "is uh favorite expression among th' Piegan Indians. It means 'All's well that ends well.' "

TRAILING THE JUNGLE MAN

by GEORGE WARBURTON LEWIS

A MAN with a machete was hewing his way through a jungle where no man had passed before. He seemed terribly in earnest about his work, but the jungle was obstinate under his blows. His head was shielded from thorn-pricks by a great, slouched Stetson, whose crown terminated in a high peak. He wore khaki, with leather leggings and was, withal, an odd-looking figure.

By hacks and slashes the machete ate its way slowly forward through the labyrinths that formed Nature's mighty barrier against the intrusion of man. The sun stood straight overhead and a humid and awful heat seemed to ooze from the matty vegetation. The man dripped perspiration from every pore.

As the afternoon aged and the sun slanted down the west he glanced up occasionally and regarded it as he might have regarded the departure forever of his only friend in the world. Always he measured the lapsing hours.

After these contemplative pauses he resumed his attack on the unyielding tangle with renewed and almost desperate energy. Once as he slashed his way onward he spied a great boa coiled in sluggish sleep in the spacious crotch of a wild mango. The man's course lay directly under the monster's perch, but, weighed against the importance of speeding time, the circumstance seemed to him insignificant. Anyhow, he knew the torpid old Central American boa, whose slothfulness and whose fear of man were as great as his own ponderous bulk.

So the man ignored the snake. But that the man knew not the ways of this particular boa was made patent when what looked amazingly like a length of hawser, vast and shiny, suddenly unrolled itself, knotted one end securely about a branch of the mango and swung its free end gracefully and swiftly downward.

The big snake's curiosity alone lost him the quarry. He did not like the look of the peaked Stetson, so he swayed around easily to peer under the brim before throwing his bone-crushing loop over the strange intruder, whereupon the man's ready-poised

Digitized by Google

machete sheared off the great head like a guillotine. The thing was done with the quickness of thought, yet in that brief space a gray, hound-shaped revolver had leaped, against emergency, into the man's free hand. The action advertised the character of the man.

Anon he reholstered the weapon, smiling slowly as the shark-like jaws of the severed head opened and closed spasmodically on the long sleek body which had followed the severed head in wriggling contortions to the ground.

For a space the man stood motionless; then he fell to listening. Not that any distracting sound had broken upon the great hush of the jungle, the tense pervading stillness that sends a nameless dread to the heart of the tenderfoot jungle-man; it was only that a starveling hope had fluttered back to him as some bewildered dove flutters out of the limitless wilds—a hope that he might catch again the mournful baying of the bloodhounds, the ultimate hope of salvation. What would he not give to hear the faint crackle of signal-shots, bearing to him the heartening message that search parties were abroad and that he was not destined to molder to a hideous skeleton in the gay green tomb of the jungle?

But no faintest sound penetrated the wide walls of foliage. The man was as much alone as if he were the only living human being in all the world. He recalled his old passion for these same silent depths of jungle that had at last trapped him. How he had loved the cool greenness, the delicious earthy smell in the early morning, and the stillness! But how much stronger than he had loved all these did he hate them now! The fawning mask was off at last and the arch-traitor stood forth. And he had been so long, so very long, in forging the links that fettered him at last to a horrible fate. Mayhap the Barbadian murderer, Simmons, for whom half the Zone police force was still combing the jungle, would find his bleached skeleton here, and, finding his sergeant's badge pinned inside his trousers pocket, would exult like the black fiend his deed had proved him to be, at an added victory over the khaki police.

The man knew that he was fighting a hopeless fight. He remembered the three fast little wars which had made their several bids for his life, each, in turn, to be thwarted; he recollected being personally congratulated by the President for his heroism in saving a hundred lives with a mere platoon of scrawny Philippine scouts. True, only nine of the platoon had come alive with him through the snappy little affray, but that fact made the victory no less a victory. And just as the last Mausers fired in the fight were popping spitefully about his ears he had got the bayonet-thrust that divorced him forever from a military career. It was indeed a hard blow, this grisly apparition that confronted him now at the laureled end of all his hard-won victories, and a great bitterness surged up in his heart.

The darkness of a moonless night overtook the man ere he had labored more than a mile beyond the dead boa. As the shadows thickened under the roof of the waking jungle, the man sat beside a waterless creek-bed and fought attacking swarms of mosquitoes.

Suddenly he gave a wheezy yell and sprang to his feet. Mellowed by distance, faint, there came to him from somewhere far to the south the doleful baying of a bloodhound. The sound was like a voice from heaven.

The man stood still and listened, fancying the repeated cry came nearer. With each booming cry the intervals grew longer and soon the baying ceased altogether. Despair again throttled the man's bounding hope. Even did searchers come across his machete-made trail they might naturally suppose it to lead from the meager thatch of some jungle Panamanian to the characteristic yucca patch on the richer soil of the highlands.

As the wild things of the deeper jungle—those that prowl by night—wakened and filled the air with their clangor the man sat on the ground, hands locked over knees, and listened in awed wonder to the strange forest medley. The innumerable orchestra of the wild places was playing to him.

He sat long under the spell of this wilderness music. He was conscious now of a growing and awful thirst. After a time, however, he put his thoughts away, and, stretching himself on the naked earth of the dry creek-bed, he dropped off to sleep after the manner of the trained soldier he was.

AT SUNDOWN of the same day, some three miles to the south of where the man meanwhile toiled in the jungle, a strange-visaged negro crept on all fours to a point where the wilderness

Digitized by Google

opened on a weedy yam-field. Once in the open he shambled forward, simulating for all the world the side-rocking gait of a bear.

Where a lime-bush screened him from chance discovery he tore up a yam-vine and eagerly inspected its yellow roots. The adhering yams were scarce larger than peanuts, but the man-animal bolted them without mastication.

A more wobegone-looking spectacle in human form probably never skulked, wild-animal fashion, upon the face of the earth. His scant clothing hung about him in tatters and frayed ribbons, exposed beneath which his chocolate-colored skin presented only a slightly less ragged appearance. Fresh blood dripped unheeded from former jungle-made wounds. He was hatless, coatless, shoeless, but a rope-strand knotted about his shrunken middle supported a revolver of large caliber.

His face was what caught and held you. It was a face such as you may behold once in a lifetime, never more; a face which, though strive as it will to conceal it, inevitably tells its own repulsive and terrible secret. The seams of pain and physical suffering were as manifest as the rivers on a map, but there was something else that dominated those telltale lines and gave you only a sort of background impression of their presence in the dark face. That something was in the negro's eyes—a roving, nervous stare in which there was nothing human, and which seemed always to penetrate and hungrily search beyond whatever object it encountered. One moment it marked an object and the next instant it had shifted with wild avidity and was searching everywhere beyond it in the same quick, restless scrutiny of everything. And although nothing escaped the rapid play of the blood-shot orbs, nothing arrested their mad race overlong. There was an indescribable combination of dread and menace in the ever-shifting glance.

When the strange man-animal had torn up a dozen yam-vines, keeping always close to cover, he painstakingly rearranged the uprooted vines to hide the evidence of his visit. Then, his dancing, lunatic eyes still galloping everywhere, he surveyed the clearing of the yam-field narrowly. It was growing dark.

Apparently satisfied that he had not been seen, he fell again upon all fours and shambled, bear-fashion, toward the darkening wall of the jungle. A shot rang out behind him. It crashed on the great stillness tremendously, startling jungle prowlers afoot and awing into a sudden raucous clamor of protest.

A momentary palsy shook the shuffling black ere he bounded to his feet and raced for cover, running low, his muscles tensed in dread expectation of a second report and a resultant slug of lead which he fancied he could feel even now tearing fiercely through the flesh and bone of his thorn-tattered body. He gained the shadowy edge of the jungle in puzzled anxiety, for whoever had fired the shot had fired but once. Safe in hiding, he looked back and listened.

He heard above the hubbub of forest noises only his own heart going like a trip-hammer. On the opposite side of the clearing an aged native was in the act of picking up from the ground a monster iguana, which, if appearances were to be trusted, he had just toppled out of a tall *aguacate* with buckshot. The negro smiled weakly at his own causeless alarm and his twanging nerves went slack. He recalled that the iguana was the chief source of the jungle Panamanian's meat-supply. It was all right.

Then, suddenly, as if remembering some event just passed over in the stress of iguana shooting, the native dropped the bagged reptile to the ground, turned and gazed steadily in the direction of the other's hiding-place. The black man shifted nervously and became more and more restless. He feared the old native only as a tale-bearer, yet tale-bearers were quite as dangerous in turn as the great, tawny, lop-eared dogs whose hoarse baying, coming ever nearer, had more than once already sent a chill of terror to his heart.

Obia man that he was, Simmons's terror of the giant, man-trailing hounds partook of the weird Voodoo superstition which formed the basis of his savage religion. Years ago a past master of the black art in his own sunny Barbados had given him a fetish—a little crooked-faced god—that enabled him to put a spell on dogs and cats. He had only to brew, with a full moon at zenith, a decoction from three certain herbs, all nourished of the devil, and the thing was done. The fierce bloodhounds upon scenting it would do his bidding meekly enough. Thus ran the strange negro's thoughts as

Digitized by Google

he stole away from the yam-field, having seen with immeasurable relief the old native take himself off with his prize, his Nimrod's lust apparently sated.

In Panama it is dark almost at sundown. Already the jungle was pitch-black. As the wild-eyed negro felt his way onward, silence, death-like and awesome, came back and seemed to throb around him like a harbinger of impending crisis. But in the few weeks of his fugitive career Simmons's fox-like existence had metamorphosed him into a jungle-man, so much of a jungle-man indeed as to make him appreciate that any analysis which he might now make of his own feelings probably would be misleading and but expedite the horrific noose which he sometimes fancied he actually felt tightening about his hapless neck.

Yet Culebra Penitentiary, he was certain, knew no torture like that which he had undergone since the recent Sunday-evening when he had stolen away from the scene of his crime at Gatun with a pack of yapping bloodhounds hot on his trail.

Often he would pause in his wanderings through the thorn-studded mazes and hold his breath to catch from afar the booming cry of the unrelenting canine sleuths. He was listening thus now. Ahead of him the North Star stood out like a vast diamond on a background of blue velvet. It seemed to look him squarely in the eyes. He fell thoughtful, for he had already begun to figure on the distance due north to Colon, the one attainable Atlantic port with Barbados-bound ships.

All at once something that came down out of the night caused him to catch his breath with a convulsive gasp and strain his ears. Yes, there it was again—the bloodhounds! The truth flashed upon him instantly. They had picked up his trail in Arcia's pasture, where his weakness for fresh milk early that morning had betrayed him. That one mistake might yet bring the dangling noose that obsessed him.

The grisly thought made him plunge forward desperately, ripping open afresh his partly healed wounds. But soon again he ceased from the mad onslaught on the tangle that barred his way and listened as before. After a little lapse the deep baying no longer reached his ears. He hoped that the cattle had destroyed the scent of his naked feet in the quagmire below Arcia's dairy-house.

AT DAYBREAK the jungle-man came out upon a trail recently hewn through the jungle and running at right angles with his northerly course. Examining it closely, he found that it had been made some twelve hours before by a large man bearing westward and using a machete. The man, too, would be a North American. It needed no Sherlock Holmes's power of deduction to arrive at these conclusions. It needed only the knowledge that the central cylinder or heart of the wild banana, when the stalk is cut off, grows just a quarter of an inch to the hour faster than the rest of the stump; that large men sink into loose mold proportionately farther than small ones, resistance calculated with reference to the size of the feet, whose prints, incidentally, determine direction.

The native Panamanian either travels barefoot or wears bull-hide sandals; hence the number ten shoe would belong to—well, the jungle-man shrewdly suspected it would be a Zone policeman. The conviction drew him forward along the trail, though with all the cunning circumspection of a hunted fox. When the huddled carcass of a snake nearly a rod in length interposed itself across his way he grimaced with the pangs of keen regret, for the great coils embraced no crushed prey and the path led on through the labyrinths uninterrupted, proving the trail-maker the unscathed victor.

An hour later the fugitive peered cautiously over the bank of a waterless creek and beheld a sight that nearly sickened him with shock. On the dry bottom of the water-course lay the motionless figure of a man either dead or deep in sleep. The jungle-man controlled himself with a mighty effort. The primitive man at the root of his being whispered:

"Kill him! kill him while the chance offers. He's a policeman—a hated white man who cuts his own trails and kills big snakes. Kill him!"

The fugitive negro was still puzzling over a course of action when suddenly the sonorous baying of a bloodhound, startlingly near at hand, floated up from the south and smote his ear like the knell of doom.

MR. RICHMOND WARRINGTON SMITH, camera-laden, helmeted, and thorn-defying in canvas and leather, by chance on the Isthmus, was doing the man-hunt into a story for

Digitized by Google

"Anybody's Magazine." A good deal of a scientist and something of a psychologist, his rough-and-ready police companions, the various 'ologies he knew about notwithstanding, accepted him as a rare good fellow. They found him equally broad of mind and shoulder, with wonderful legs, which, in common with their own seasoned ones, could stretch the length of any trail.

Just now Mr. Smith and camera, with Corporal Dan Poole, the leash-master, stood on the bank of a narrow river that flanked Arcia's cow pasture, whither an undersized female bloodhound, madly giving tongue, had led them.

"Of course, we've got to swim for it," said Smith, suggesting the obvious; and Poole reluctantly agreed that it was to swim.

Beauty, the very ugly she-dog, was becoming well-nigh unmanageable in her eagerness to take to the water. Her sustained bellowing, telling of the freshening scent, was already attracting the thin skirmish-line of searchers within a mile radius. Figures were appearing as if by magic on every promontory near and far, and the khaki-uniformed men could be seen shading their eyes with their hands as they watched operations in the direction of the newly recovered trail.

"Now, Mr. Smith," said the leash-master calmly, "we can test the 'science of scent' which you expressed some doubt about."

"Yes," returned Smith interestedly.

"We are already convinced that the 'subject' left *terra firma* at this point and took to the river," explained Poole. "Being a Barbadian he was naturally an expert swimmer, and for that reason it is not certain, or even likely, that he left the water on the other side opposite the point where we are now standing."

"You mean," queried the magazine writer, "that quarry like ours would swim either up or down stream in the hope of baffling the hounds? Exactly. In that case your leader, on gaining the other bank, will simply gallop up and down the water's edge until she picks up the scent."

"Precisely," said Poole, "only you're wrong, Mr. Smith. Now watch her."

He hauled the straining brute up short and unsnapped the leash. With a final whine and a flexing of muscles the dog shot into the water. She disappeared momentarily, rose and blew the water from her sensitive nostrils like a human diver. Hesitating for a moment and treading water, she swung her upward-pointing nose to right and left; then whining uneasily she made off down-stream at an angle which would bring her out on the opposite bank of the river some hundreds of yards below.

"That's almost uncanny," observed Smith, following the dog with his eyes. "Here, put your watch into this manuscript case," he supplemented hastily as he saw Poole wad up his outer clothing into a compact bundle. "It's water-tight," he added, "and it's floated on the Modder and the Bag-bag. I've got to ooze into the drink by degrees to keep the picture machine dry a-top my dome. Ready?"

Heading straight across the river, they were just in time by cross-cutting, to fall in behind the bellowing Beauty. She had resumed the scent on the farther bank at her exact place of landing, one-eighth of a mile below the point of interruption. Smith enthusiastically snapped her with his camera as she swung away over the open at a swift canter.

A quarter of a mile farther on, the hurrying trio struck the jungle with a crash. The hound whined pitiably as the thorn-barbed undergrowth gashed her tawny flanks anew, but the trail was growing maddeningly fresher with every mile traversed and the brute's augmenting fury dominated thorn-pricks and all else.

"Comin'?" shouted the wiry corporal over his shoulder, as he dropped nimbly over a small precipice.

"Right behind you," assured Smith, landing with a thump that jarred his surplus tissue into jelly-quivers. "The Aero Club missed a good pointer in gliding that time," panted Smith as he leaped away to another onslaught on the tangle that hemmed them round like a wall.

With a baby machete he hacked away beside the leash-master to extricate the frothing animal, already entangled in mesh-vines.

"Everybody'll read this," he ventured after a while, "but nobody'll believe it—and dash me if I'll blame 'em! What'u've you got?" he inquired quickly, for Poole was kneeling in a scrutiny of something on the ground.

Smith watched the officer lay a piece of tape over the clean-cut print of a bare foot.

Digitized by Google

Suddenly Poole yelled, sprang up and darted after the released dog.

"It's him!" he shouted. "It's him!"

Beauty was once more crashing on through the jungle, giving tongue in fierce and terrible eagerness.

"Don't flush him till I get this plate ready," cautioned Smith, fingering his camera.

"You'd better have a second plate ready —he's liable to fracture that one with a bullet," flung back Poole with a grin.

"You don't imagine he's armed, do you?" The magazine man was hiding a pseudo-serious smile from the leash-master, who, in turn, was doing the same thing with reference to Smith.

"If reports are true he's nothing short of a perambulating arsenal," from the officer.

"Think he'd recognize, in the stress of the moment, a non-combatant knight of the quill?" quizzed Smith, lowering a cactus with his machete.

"That's the trouble," grinned Poole, "I'm afraid he would."

"In which case—" suggested Smith.

"In which case—" repeated the policeman.

"Save the films," completed Smith, laughingly adding something about "posterity."

Both fell silent and plowed ahead with irresistible energy. The morning was well advanced. The single eye of the equatorial sun was beginning to glare in among the tree-tops and radiate that humid, stifling heat which so soon saps the vitality of man and beast.

"W-o-w! What's this?" suddenly burst from Smith.

Their course had abruptly intersected by a narrow, clean-cut swath which right-angled across the man-made trail. Beauty hesitated only a moment, then swung off westward over the unobstructed swath as if possessed.

Poole and Smith sprinted to keep up. She leaped sidewise in the trail instinctively as her dripping muzzle came afoul of a huge boa, huddled and coiled in a great pyramidal heap. Smith, following close on the heels of the dog, stopped short, gave a low, startled cry and backed away. He glanced round and saw the leash-master standing there in silence. A big gun had got into his hand. Poole was surprised to note that the writer man had suddenly produced an automatic pistol, though he had thought him unarmed.

"Stick his head on till I snap him." The magazine man smiled at the policeman good-naturedly. "It'll add at least fifty to the reading value of the story to have him alive. Whopper, isn't he?"

The facility with which Smith fitted into situations pleased Poole beyond expression. His dry humor had lent to the long and tiresome jaunt a novelty which had leavened no other chase of the leash-master's entire experience. He watched Smith stoop and examine foot-prints as they resumed the trail.

"There's a number ten shoe been over this trail," asserted Smith after a while. "I know because that's my own size."

"Jack Lantry's out here somewhere—lost. Been missing a week. Wears a number ten, I think. Maybe he's got in behind our friend Simmons. Maybe—maybe he's *got* him!"

Poole was talking over his shoulder to Smith between breaths, as he trotted easily behind the cantering dog.

"If Lantry's captured him, it's bad," commented Smith with professional thoughtfulness. "In a great story like this there should be what we call 'sustained suspense.' Now this skin-tearing, execrable dash from the Mindi magazine, with its attendant loss, through post-graduate profanity, of our remotest chance of salvation, constitutes the suspense; and you will agree that nothing short of a sensational, Diamond Dick finish can justify such a lavish expenditure of soul and body."

Descending rapidly, they burst out suddenly upon a gray ribbon of naked earth that wriggled along at the foot of a camel-backed mountain. It was the bone-dry bed of a creek. A jumble of footprints, both bare and booted, clearly defined on the slag, had the trailers doing a quizzical canvass of the lot.

There was the number ten shoe, right enough, but commingled with the prints of bare feet at least two sizes smaller; but most important of all, at a point where the distinct print of intersticed clothing indicated that a heavy body had lain, the pursuers made out spots of blood, now turning dark.

The man-hunters were nonplussed. They exchanged questioning glances but said nothing. The hound, however, had already picked out of the confusion what her unerring olfactories told her was the true scent.

Digitized by Google

Away she tore once more through the tangle and, hacking, struggling, straining, her flagging companions came on after her.

It was a wild race. A mile back a score of khaki-uniformed black policemen, products of the British West Indies, but now transplanted on the Isthmus because of their previous police experience, were coming on in a terrific but vain scramble to overtake the leash-master and the magazine man. They had followed with more dogs from Arcia's cow pasture.

The "white-hot" trail, as the leash-master styled it, was gradually winding back toward a semblance of civilization. Beauty, no longer giving tongue, slipped noiselessly between half a dozen native huts, Poole and Smith at her tail-tip. On the bank of a little stream, they noted, a nondescript half-cast girl, slim, brown and with something of mystery in her covert glance and over-done deliberation, was embarking in a small *cayuco*.

"I remember that creek," panted Poole; "I think this trail runs parallel with it clear to Gatun—and it's drinkable."

"Then I'll fill my canteen," quickly decided the provident Smith. "Beauty, I observe, is already filling hers."

Their thirst slaked, the trail again drew the pursuers forward as loadstone draws steel, with the elements of excitement, mystery, danger, the magnet.

The day had slipped away unheeded in the stress of events. Twilight lowered its gray mantle upon the wilderness. The North Star stood out faintly. Poole got a shot at a pheasant, crippling it. With a broken wing and a maimed body, the bird ran flapping and crying for the denser jungle.

Poole threw the leash to Smith and crashed after the wounded bird. At top speed he was barely able to keep in sight of the game he had all but bagged. After a moment the quarry turned sharply and went gliding along a deer trail, and this within a dozen leaps gradually widened into what was unmistakably the spoor of a tapir. So much space favored the fell design of the pursuer.

Unobstructed by undergrowth, Poole gave a final spurt of speed, closed up and threw himself prone upon the fluttering bird, imprisoning it beneath him. Relieving the pretty feathered sufferer with death, he rose and stood panting in the trail, his eyes slowly inspecting his surroundings as it began to dawn upon him that he might have difficulty in getting back to Smith and the man-trail. Something suddenly arrested his gaze and he stood there in the failing gray light as though turned to stone. Into his eyes there came a look of wonder, incredulity.

What he beheld was—well, it was evidently some sort of a human being. It was coming toward him along the trail over which he had just chased the pheasant, and it was coming bear-fashion, on all fours!

The thing was clothed only in the last remnants of shirt and trousers, both whipped and ripped almost beyond recognition as such, by long contact with the hostile jungle. Disheveled, matty hair hung in a great shock over the man-bear's eyes, and his face was covered with what seemed a thick-set black beard of many weeks' growth. The thing cantered strikingly like a bear, yet it was terribly in the image of man. Steadily it ambled nearer.

Dan Poole stared and tried to think. Could this monster be Simmons, the fiend who had committed the revolting murder at Gatun? He could arrive in that instant of reflection at nothing more likely, and the police records said that Simmons was a "dangerous fugitive," yet for some unaccountable reason the leash-master felt no impulse to draw a weapon. Never in his life, he was sure, had he seen a member of the human family that more closely resembled a gigantic ape.

Within a few yards of him, the apparition reared itself upright, apparently with a mighty effort, and stood contemplating the policeman with vacant, bloodshot blue eyes that were set in a fearfully emaciated and wholly expressionless face. Poole saw that the thing's lips were black and shriveled like those of a mummy, and he was reminded that a merciless drouth had long lain upon the jungle. Few indeed were the creek- and river-bottoms that were not dry as the Sahara.

"Who—who are you?" gasped Poole, when he could overcome his amazement.

The cracked lips parted as if to respond, but Poole caught no sound, whereat his curiosity became greater than his realization of the poor wretch's physical needs, and he leaned nearer to the hideous face and repeated his question. Faint, wheezy

Digitized by Google

sounds issued from between the bloodless lips:

"I'm Sim—Simmons! came in a strained and awesome whisper that seemed to use up the man-bear's last mite of vitality. He tottered on his bleeding feet as if fainting from exhaustion, and the leash-master slipped a supporting arm about the half-naked shoulders.

"You're not Simmons," Poole challenged tentatively; "Simmons is a mulatto." He was plumbing the unfortunate fellow's reason.

"I—I am Simmons!" protested the apparition desperately.

He gasped for breath after the exertion of speech. His blue eyes stared at Poole's face unwinkingly, lifelessly, like blind eyes which, though gazing fixedly, do not see. After a space his lips moved again.

"Where are—the dogs?"

"The dogs are at Culebra," lied Poole, to calm the other's possible apprehensions.

The strange fellow's next astounding query almost took Dan Poole off his feet.

"Are—you—all right—Poole?" came the squeally, dry voice.

The policeman started and stared at sound of his own name. Surely he had not misunderstood.

"Do you know me?" he questioned incredulously.

"Of course—you're Dan Poole—the dog man!"

The wasted hairy face was as blank as a wall, but the words were unmistakable. The leash-master scrutinized the dull blue eyes even more critically, for now of a sudden there was something in them that strangely awakened memory. The policeman knew that shock at sight of a familiar face will often dispel certain forms of hallucination.

"Stop your fooling!" suddenly snapped Poole, grinning in the wretch's immobile face. "You're Jack Lantry—got lost a month ago looking for Simmons. Don't try to put any lost identity stuff across with me, sergeant.

"Tell you—I'm Simmons, Simmons! Understand? Had on—these same rags—ever since—the night—I killed her. I'm Simmons—a dirty—nigger murderer. Oh, God!"

For the first time the dead eyes and shrunken lips expressed feeling. The terrible face drew into a mask of bitterest remorse.

Poole could scarcely believe the testimony of his ears. He resolved, however, to have done with the matter without more delay.

"You're coming with me now, old fellow," he said with finality, gently assisting his strange charge by a fleshless arm.

TEN minutes later, Richmond Warrington Smith, impatiently awaiting the return of the policeman with, or without the pheasant, gave a single gasp of astonishment and his eyes grew round with something more than unbelief. He had come in search of thrills and now he got one. But he was quick to recover and produce from among his photographic odds and ends a tiny flashlight, by which he eagerly inspected the self-proclaimed Simmons. At sight of the blackened lips of the strange creature the magazine man reached for his canteen with a cry of impatience at Poole's lack of forethought. "A little at a time," he warned as his famished patient clutched desperately at the canteen. "Too much would make short work of you."

The disheveled fellow's shaking hands went back to his sides and his vacant blue eyes stared away listlessly into the starlight.

"Listen," cautioned Poole; "thought I heard a voice."

Smith joined the leash-master with straining ears. The jungle was again beginning to vibrate with night sounds. An orchestra of crickets near-by was tuning its instruments for the nocturnal orgy. A bird whose terrorizing shriek had once given even sturdy Dan Poole a great start, suddenly screamed like some monster forest feline, and a laughing cockatoo an instant later ridiculed its effort with shrill, hiccoughy laughter which sounded startlingly human. Another interval of comparative silence, then a plaintive negro voice came over the trail to the listeners.

"Dese dogs is shoh haulin' me 'long like dey smells somet'ing."

Then a response—

"Tain't der dinneh, leas'wise, 'cause Simmons is mos' likely gone back to Bahbados."

The listening white men knew that the colored policemen, who had followed the new-found trail in Arcia's pasture, were at last overtaking them.

Smith caught Poole with his eyes fixed on the ground, lost in thought.

Digitized by Google

"What d'you make of it all?" he quizzed. "Is this tattered chap your missing sergeant or not?"

Poole did not answer immediately and Smith ran on.

"If this be Lantry—and I suppose it must be—then where's the uniform he wore, and his gun, and how in the devil did he come to possess a rig like he's wearing?" Smith's perplexity was developing his serious side.

"Come to think of it," drawled Poole, "in the light of what we already know it's not hard to arrive at a logical conclusion. Listen, Mr. Smith. Beside the barefoot trail which we followed down to that dry creek-bed, you will recall that there were the prints of a number ten shoe. Both the bare and the shod footprints led down to the creek-bottom, where we found that some one had lain, perhaps asleep or unconscious. At the point where we found the impress of a human body there was blood on the ground and on the dry leaves. Now it was the shod person who had lain on the ground. The barefoot one apparently had only walked about the other while the latter lay supine. There was no evidence of any struggle, on foot, though it appeared that the supine figure had rolled, or had been rolled, over one or more times.

"Now, Mr. Smith, I am coming to what I started to tell you. When we left that creek-bed I had no idea that we'd be able to follow this trail as far as we've followed it. Of course, you don't get me. The reason for my conclusion however is clear. On coming away from that water-course I noted that you failed to remark a peculiar fact. I myself made the discovery only by the merest chance, for the ground was such that the footprints were not very clearly defined. Mr. Smith, while one pair of shod feet and one pair of bare feet led down to the blood-stains on the creek-bottom, only bare feet—two pairs of them—led away from there!

"Now any sane person must deduce that the shod man did not take off his shoes and carry them away in his hand. There is no obvious reason why he should have done so. There is the very best of reasons, however, why Barefeet, or Simmons himself, should have taken off the other's shoes and all the rest of his enemy's wearing apparel and appropriated them to his own use. Though I could not bring myself to believe it at first, I am now convinced that this pitiable victim of thirst and hallucination is indeed Lantry, and this being the case you may be sure that it was Simmons who carried away his shoes and uniform, leaving behind, or himself disguising the sergeant in the miserable raiment which he, the murderer, had worn throughout his flight and pursuit.

"The ugly wound in this poor fellow's forehead would indicate that Simmons deemed it necessary to overcome resistance in stripping him of clothing which might stand the negro in good stead for purposes of disguise. It is this wound, too, doubtless, that has contributed to the victim's delusion that he is Simmons. That's the way I dope it all out," concluded the leash-master, "and I want to add that just as soon as Simmons thinks he can spare the time to stop and don his newly acquired footgear—right then and there this smoking-hot trail will end as abruptly as if it had never existed."

"You mean that he will put on Lantry's shoes to confuse the dogs?" inquired Smith.

"Just that," returned Poole.

"But couldn't we——"

Dim figures suddenly appeared about them out of the gloom and Smith's question was not completed. A number of colored officers with three extra dogs in leash stood erect as Indians at "attention," in the half-light, their British military training stamping them unmistakably, as the stereotyped form of report, "All correct, suh," rippled in brisk cadence from mouth to mouth. Poole failed to recognize all who reported, but he recalled that two of the number had come down from Culebra with the three extra dogs.

"Which two of you are from Culebra?" he asked.

Two officers quickly responded, saluting. A third reported his station as Gorgona, adding that Lieutenant Hooper had dispatched him the day before as Gorgona's quota in maintaining the pursuit.

The trail was quickly resumed where interrupted, Beauty leading away eagerly, the policemen carrying the self-alleged Simmons on an improvised litter. The strange little procession moved with all caution, for Beauty's continued whining, as she fairly dragged Poole by the leash, warned that the fleeing negro could not be far off.

Then, just when all was going finely,

Digitized by Google

Poole's prophecy suddenly took the form of a reality. The trail broke off—broke off short, just as if it had never been, as if the hard-pressed quarry had literally risen from the earth and flown whither he willed. Beauty, thwarted almost in sight of the game she had so long followed, was momentarily almost beyond control in her fierce endeavors to get off on a canvass to recover the lost scent.

"That will be all for this evening," drawled Poole laconically, snubbing the straining dog close up to a sapling, and facing about for the usual comment from a contiguous patch of shadow which he guessed was Smith.

But the shadow, statuesquely rigid, vouchsafed no comment, and Poole stepped nearer it with a light familiarity, only to find to his amusement that he was addressing one of the colored policemen. Smith, he found, was farther back on the trail, carefully administering a few more drops of water to resuscitate his strangely obsessed charge.

To continue on now would be worse than useless, so camp was made under a century-old mango, and Poole and Smith, though dead weary from the long fatiguing chase, lay far into the night with unclosed eyelids, speculating on what might be the cunning negro's latest plan of escape, each reducing broad logic to find lines of deduction that narrowed down and down until they became as infinitesimal threads of gossamer floating away into the infinity of the potential.

With the first faint glow of dawn, Dan Poole, smelling wood smoke, stirred drowsily, turned over and then lay with troubled, wide open eyes fixed on vacancy. A dozen yards away Beauty, alert and restive as always, was tethered to a drooping branch of the mango.

Two or three of the colored policemen were already astir, thanks to the swarming mosquitoes, and engaged in boiling coffee in their long tin cups over a green wood fire. One of these dusky conservators of order, apparently satisfied that his breakfast was preparing in due form, sauntered over to contemplate the she-dog that as a trailer of human beings had long since become a Zone celebrity. As the policeman approached, the gaunt animal perked her pouchy ears forward in a strange way, and her quivering nostrils scented the air in obvious distrust.

Poole raised himself languidly upon an elbow and poked the dreaming Smith in the ribs to add to the dog's audience. What the half-awake magazine man saw came as so great a tax upon his credulity that, for the first time in his life, he forgot to bring his ever-ready camera into play. Beauty stood motionless, rigid, her muscles queerly tensed, her whole dog interest concentrated upon the advancing negro policeman, who was now quite near her. Then, spellbound, as if palsied with wonder, the two men sat and watched a spectacle which transcended the wildest imagination.

Beauty suddenly crouched low and shot upward like a tiger for the black's throat. The policeman, a strange-visaged, brutish looking fellow, stopped short, smiling, for he trusted the strong leash that held the trailer in check.

There was just time to see the negro's confident smile change into a sickly mask of terror as the worn leash snapped like a whip-cracker, and the unhampered brute, so suddenly and unexplainably transformed into a ferocious wild thing of the jungle, fastened her teeth in the black man's throat.

In the twinkling of an eye the negro, his fear gone as he crashed to solid earth, whipped out a revolver and shoved the muzzle into the hound's flank, but Poole, leaping up in the same instant, dashed the weapon up as its roar smashed the morning calm like a cannon-shot.

"Take that gun away from him!" shouted Poole to one of the policemen who had rushed to his aid, indicating the queer-looking officer who, he now suddenly remembered, had reported from Gorgona.

Poole had got a grip on Beauty's collar and choked her down, though she still struggled. The Gorgona man had risen. His eyes were wild with fright, his khaki blouse streaked with crimson from his torn throat. He backed away as if horrified, as if he mistrusted the friendship of his own kind, his smoking weapon, however held ready; and now for the first time since he had reported on the previous evening, Poole and his men got a good look at the Gorgona man's face. It was seamed and scarred, and desperation was written on it from the wildly rolling eyes to the gripping lower jaw.

Smith had recovered his wonted calm.

Digitized by Google

As the negro retreated, his camera clicked familiarly. The next instant a missile from the crazed black's revolver shattered the writer's lens and left a slow trickle of blood dripping from his benumbed wrist.

The first shock of surprise overcome, revolvers began to appear in the hands of the man-hunters. Poole saw that the strange desperado was backing toward the river.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop, or you're a dead nigger!"

But the black man did not stop. He answered the challenge with a whining shower of bullets, sprang sideways to frustrate aims, whirled and, stretching a hand to a slim brown girl who appeared to have been awaiting him in concealment there, made off like the wind. Twigs and leaves fell about the mad negro as a hail of bullets followed him in the direction of the river.

Dan Poole, however, was not to be outdone. At top speed he raced after the new quarry, tearing unheedingly through the thorny undergrowth and followed by his wonder-stricken but faithful subordinates. After a minute they came out on the bank of the Gatun river.

There was a small *cayuco* tied to a mangle—the same that Poole and Smith had remarked the day before; and in the *cayuco* was the same slim brown girl they had seen embarking in it. The mysterious girl was bending over the collapsed figure of a negro who had murdered his girl wife out of unfounded jealousy, and who had himself loved a slim brown girl of another race. The negro was Simmons, dead, with a bullet through his neck, garbed in the full uniform of the Zone Police, even to a sergeant's badge, which Poole found pinned to the lining of one of the trousers pockets, and which, with other familiar articles exhibited to him, had the remarkable effect of restoring to Jack Lantry his lost reason.

A WEST INDIAN DANCE

by RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

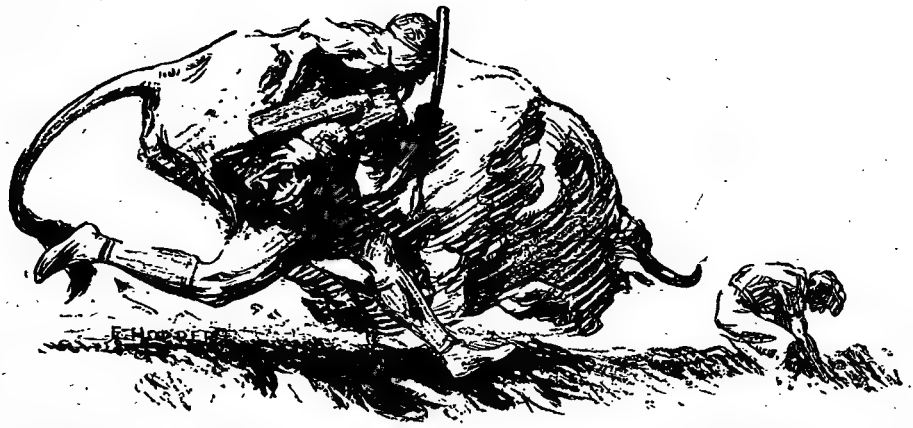
HO! THERE'S a dance in Ballahou!
B'lip-b'lib-b'lip! . . . Be-rum! Be-rum!
Hark! The roll of the big *tambou*,
The roll of the goat-skin barrel-drum.

Over the river to old Roseau
Rumbles the call of the *tambouyé:*
Over the river, and faster, flow
The barefoot blacks to their wild *bélé.*

See them grinning—Pierre, Zabette!
Are they going? Who is not—
In working *jupe*, in gay *douillette*,
In tatters, in no matter what!

Watch them swaying as they come,
Turbaned with every parrot hue.
B'lip-b'lib-b'lip! . . . Be-rum! Be-rum!
Aie! There's a dance in Ballahou!

Digitized by Google



IN THE GRIP OF THE MINOTAUR

A FOUR PART STORY by FARNHAM BISHOP and ARTHUR GILCHRIST BRODEUR Part II

AT THE dawn of civilization, long before the rise of Greece, King Minos of Crete, by virtue of his great fleet, ruled the Mediterranean world. He drew tribute from many cities, one of which was Troy, ruled by old King Dardanus whose beautiful daughter, Ilia, was desired by Prince Ambrogeos of Crete.

From out of the north came a strange wolf-prowed ship to Troy. It carried Ragnarr, a Norse prince, Valgard, his right-hand warrior, and two score giant Northmen. They first visited Troy Fair where Ragnarr rescued from drunken lumbermen, Rala, a pretty little acrobat, who straightway attached herself to him as a life-servant.

Ragnarr was then entertained by King Dardanus. He met Ilia and each loved the other almost from that moment. Meanwhile Ragnarr learned from Dardanus that King Minos of Crete was crushing tribute from Troy.

Dardanus needed ships which Ragnarr's men could build and arms which the Pharaoh of Egypt alone could furnish. Dardanus promised Ilia to Ragnarr if the Norse prince would bring arms from Egypt and help overthrow Minos. Ragnarr agreed, and on the eve of his departure he gave Rala to Ilia as a maid.

That same day a Cretan galley landed at Troy, bringing Admiral Rhodonthos and Prince Ambrogeos, come to claim Ilia. The Northmen defeated the Cretans in a street brawl. Ambrogeos swore to bring Ragnarr to account for presuming to be the equal of the Prince of Crete.

Then Ambrogeos demanded Ilia from Dardanus. Ilia hated Ambrogeos. But when she learned that the price of her refusal would be the overthrow of her father's kingdom she sadly consented to their marriage.

She was to remain in Troy until the return of Ambrogeos from Egypt, where he expected to form a pact between his father and Pharaoh by marrying the Egyptian princess, promising Dardanus, however, that Ilia would take precedence over the daughter of Pharaoh.

Ragnarr learned from Rala of the perfidy of weak old Dardanus. The hour for Ilia's marriage was at hand. Through an underground passage the Norse prince led his Goths into the temple where Dardanus and his court had assembled for the marriage ceremony.

The Northmen broke into the great hall. Ragnarr cut down Prince Ambrogeos, then defied Dardanus and all his guard, while Ilia went to his arms.

Dardanus was terrified. Admiral Rhodonthos told old Dardanus quickly what the vengeance of Minos would be, then the body of Ambrogeos was borne away to the Cretan ship. Dardanus explained to Ragnarr that every year twenty youths and twenty maidens were levied from Troy by

Digitized by Google

Minos to feed the Cretan Minotaur, a terrible monster that none ever met and returned to describe. Now Minos would demand a life from every household in Troy for the deed committed by Ragnarr.

Raising his sword Tyrfing, the Norse prince swore by a great oath to sail to the island of Crete, give himself up to meet the Minotaur and slay him in single combat. Then would he return to Troy and claim Ilia, his bride.

For he knew not that Valgard had already told Ilia that the *Gray Wolf* sailed at flood tide in two hours, and that Ilia had promised to come to a grove on the river's bank by the southwest gate and meet the ship.

OUT through the Scæan Gate the Northmen strode, with the air of men who have won a city. Ragnarr and Valgard at their head, they tramped through the still sleeping streets of the fair-ground, till they came to the trampled site of their trading-booths, where lay the imposing heap of chests and bales, stuffed with treasure, unguarded but untouched. Valgard heaved a great sigh of relief.

"That these were in the king's keeping has kept away lesser thieves—by the grace of Tyr and his good fog."

"Now that my compact with that king is broken," replied Ragnarr, "I see no need to fatten his treasury with the profits of our voyage. Take them up, men, one to each bale end—steady. Porters to the front, pikemen to the rear, and silence, all."

In this order they went down to the river-bank, skirted the grove, and so came to their ship. Now began the harder task of lading their precious freight aboard the *Gray Wolf*.

Half the crew clambered aboard, where some shifted the stores in the hold, making room for the new cargo, while others lined the port gunwale, and received the burdens which the men on the bank passed over the low side. The difficulty of their work was greatly increased by the necessity of doing everything in the darkness, lest the glare of torches, as the fog grew thin, should betray them to the enraged Cretans.

Gradually, imperceptibly, the gray of morning diluted the dark of night, and the outlines of shore, trees and the towers of Troy began to assume dim, yet definable outlines. Now Valgard drew Hjalti the Bard aside, and whispered to him:

"Comrade, go over to yonder clump of plane-trees, where the path opens out. Keep a sharp watch, and when you see a woman, call to me quickly."

"A woman, eh?" the bard gibed. "Now age has surely touched you, Valgard, if you think to bring a light-o'-love on our prince's ship. Have you forgotten what he did to the Fossdaler whom he caught smuggling the pretty red-haired wench aboard at the Isle of Mines?"

"Peace, fool!" the old man answered. "This is no light-o'-love, but the Princess Ilia, whom I have persuaded to fly with us, that our rash Ragnarr may think better of his mad resolve and sail for home."

Hjalti whistled softly to himself.

"But mark you," continued Valgard, "this is my own plan, and the prince knows nothing of it. We must get her on ship prudently, so none shall see it; else the ale is spilled."

"And how do you propose to do it, with all these curious fellows between us and the ship?"

"Easily enough, if you do your part. See, this chest here is nearly empty. You may have noticed that I let none help me with it. If I should be called away when the lady comes, do you put her within the chest, upon the sail-cloth which covers its bottom, close the lid, and tie it up with this rope. The hand-holes will give her air enough."

Hjalti nodded knowingly.

"Leave it to me," he answered.

"Ho, Valgard! Where is Valgard?" called Ragnarr from the galley, and the old man hurried off.

Hjalti took up his watch. The light grew and the dawn was at hand. Suddenly his trained ear caught the sound of light footsteps, and a slim form approached among the trees. Hjalti stepped out from the shadow.

"Here, lady," he said, and beckoned her to him.

The girl, heavily cloaked in an enveloping gray mantle, advanced fearlessly and stood by his side. Hastily he made her acquainted with the arrangements, and raised the lid of the chest. Without demurring she stepped into it and lay down upon the sail-cloth. He closed the chest quickly, roped it, and with infinite care raised it on his broad back.

Digitized by Google

Picking his ground carefully, he walked slowly to the ship.

As he approached, Valgard hurried to meet him, and cautiously keeping the chest level, they raised it to the gunwale. Here Hjalti held it while Valgard clambered aboard, picked up the burden, and lifted it in. He carried the chest to the bow and placed it very carefully on a pile of mats.

Now all was ready. The oarsmen at the port bow placed their long ash-blades against the bank and shoved the *Gray Wolf's* nose out into the stream, while those at the waist and stern kept her from striking against the bank.

Poling deftly, the crew brought her into midstream, swung her round as far as they could, settled their oars in the rowlocks, and placed themselves on their benches. As Valgard at the steering oar brought her toward the west bank Ragnarr ordered the mast to be stepped. Then swiftly ran the bast ropes through the well-greased grooves of the wooden blocks, up rose the long yard and the painted sail, and the fresh seaward breeze of the morning filled her canvas and urged her down the stream.

IN THE spaces between the rowing-benches Ragnarr had stationed archers, bow on string, to repel attack in case the Cretans should be waiting with hostile intent; and by each oarsman stood an extra man, who held a shield before the rower.

As the *Gray Wolf* neared the bend Valgard flung himself against the steering-oar, and she drove past their foeman's berth at top speed, the water hissing by her sides. But the Cretan ship was gone. Ragnarr, watching on the fore-deck, searched the river's length, but there was no sight of her; and he realized with relief that she must have sailed at least an hour before.

With her three sails and trim, racing hull, she must be so far ahead that there would be no danger of overtaking her. This was well, for it would be no light task to fight an enemy that both outnumbered and outsailed them, and he wished to save himself for the combat with the Minotaur.

They passed the river's mouth and ran out into the Hellespont to the ringing send-off of the coast-guard's cheers. The sail was lowered and they swung the galley round in a half circle. Now the oarsmen had to bear the whole burden of their progress, for the lack of keel or lee-board kept her from sailing anywhere but before the wind.

As Ragnarr left the prow and made his way aft between the benches, the sun rose in glory, ushering in a cloudless day. After four hours the first shift of oarsmen were relieved and gathered amidships to eat their meal of hard, sour bread, a little dried fruit, and the last fresh meat they were to have for four days, washed down with tepid water tasting of its earthen jar.

By noon they had rounded Cape Sigeion and floated into the blue Ægean. Valgard, who had refused to be relieved before, now gave over his post and came forward to where Ragnarr sat by the mast.

"Master," he began, "what welcome do you look for yonder in Crete, with the blood of the king's son on your sword?"

"Such as that sword can win me," answered Ragnarr.

"Do you think to conquer a wide land with three score men?"

"I know not what the gods have in store, but I have sworn on Tyrfing to kill the evil Minotaur, and when one hunts, he must go where the game lies."

"It seems to me, master," the old warrior said dubiously, "that before you can kill the Minotaur our friends in the painted ships will kill you, aye, and all these good men of yours with you."

"Know you of any other way?" asked Ragnarr, raising his eyebrows.

"Perchance I do," Valgard answered slowly. "Age sees farther ahead than youth, and while you were swearing that rash oath my mind was weighing three score graves in a foreign land against the prospect of a merry life in our own good island, back in the distant north. I found the thought of home better, and made a plan to bring us there in safety."

Ragnarr raised his eyes to his friend's, his face inscrutable. "And your plan was?" he asked.

"My plan lies in that chest, master," Valgard answered, pointing toward the cypress box which lay just abaft the fore-peak. "Do you go to it and untie the rope, and you shall see what will shorten all our labors."

In silence, Ragnarr rose, undid the bast rope, and threw back the cover. There lay a woman, her face half covered with the cloak that wrapped her form. Slowly she stirred,

Digitized by Google

drew up one knee, then the other, tried to rise, but fell back limp and lame. Ragnarr took her hands and drew her forth, and the cloth slipped from her face. With one accord both men cried out in astonishment. Before them stood Rala!

"What does this mean? What have you done?" cried Ragnarr.

Valgard stood gaping, his features blank.

"Speak, fool!" his master shouted, seizing him by the shoulder.

Rala gave a little moan and swayed forward. Breaking from Ragnarr's grip, Valgard caught her in his arms and said quickly: "First let this child be fed; it will be time for talk thereafter."

So saying, he carried the stiff and weary girl to a bench, and then brought out some food and a little wine. He made her drink first, and the color came back into her cheeks. As she ate he told Ragnarr of his plot, and how he hoped that once he found Ilia with him, the prince would give up his mad enterprise and sail for home.

"As for this child," he concluded, "I can not say how she came to supplant her mistress."

"You were wrong, old man," said Ragnarr sternly. "Do you know me so ill as to dream that I would break my oath, sworn on the sword Tyrfing? Did I not know your love for me, this jest would be the last you would ever play. But I forgive you, seeing that your plans miscarried."

Rala, by now completely revived, put her hand in Valgard's and told her part in the affair.

"Last night the princess came to me," she said, "and told me what had happened to the Cretan. She bade me fetch her cloak and then lay down to rest a while. I was to call her in an hour, for she purposed to steal from the city and sail with you. I obeyed. We left her chamber an hour before the dawn, and crept down through the palace to the secret passage. She went before, bearing the lamp, for she was eager to be rid of Troy and all the sorrows it had brought her. As we entered the vault beneath the temple, a voice cried:

"'Here are they who removed the stone! Seize them!'

"And armed men rushed out upon us. The princess struck out the light. I cowered close to the wall and heard them go tramping past. At last I heard a scream; then the princess cried out:

"'Fly, Rala! Tell him——'

"And her voice ceased. 'It is the princess!' a soldier said. 'Treat her tenderly.'

"I crept along as quietly as I could, and presently I heard their footsteps die away, for they had no lights and could not find the way out of the vault into the narrow passage again in time to catch me. I made my way to the shore, where your men were embarking. It was too late to recover the princess, and I knew that you had none to direct your course to Crete, or instruct you in the ways of its people. I could not let you go to that cruel land unguided, so I took advantage of Valgard's trick to come with you."

Valgard gazed at her in mingled pride and astonishment, for he saw little hope of this girl's being able to give them material assistance in this task. Ragnarr, on the other hand, took the affair in a matter-of-fact way.

"Now that she is here, she must stay," he said, "for we can waste no time putting back to Troy, nor would we be welcomed there. Besides, she helped us greatly last night, and who knows what she may do for us again. I confess that I am somewhat troubled, for she is a fugitive from Crete, and it may be dangerous for her to return. Still, Rala, what is done is done, and we shall face what comes as comrades."

Valgard busied himself constructing a small tent out of sail-cloth laid across two of the high thwarts.

"Here is your cabin," he said, showing it to the girl, who examined it with delight and interest.

It was completely screened in on all sides, and a pile of soft mats served as couch and floor in one. Situated as it was in the roomy shoulders of the ship it was distant from the quarters of most of the crew, and Valgard assured her of complete protection by shifting his own sleeping-mat to alongside the little tent.

"How will you explain your coming to the Cretans, my lord?" Rala asked as the swift oars carried them ever nearer to their goal. "Either Ambrogeos is dead, or prostrate with long illness from his wound. In either case, you who struck him down will be fortunate if you are not slain as soon as you set foot on the shore."

Ragnarr tugged at his mustache. "There is only one thing to say," he declared thoughtfully. "I have come to slay this

Digitized by Google

Minotaur. We shall give ourselves up as hostages for our own deed, claiming to be sent by Dardanus as the first and most fitting sacrifice to the Minotaur. I shall demand to be the first victim, and when I come face to face with the monster I shall slay him."

"But what if he slay you? Do not think that you will be permitted to retain your arms."

"Then I will wrestle with him, and kill him with my hands," answered Ragnarr. "And I am sure the Cretan folk will not harm us until then, for our offense was such that we are doubtless doomed to the highest punishment: the sacrifice to the monster."

"I think they will make sport with us first," the girl said. "The Cretans love all manner of athletic games, and one way of disposing of their victims is the contest with the bull, which they hold sacred to their gods. I know this game, for I have played it myself, and it is very dangerous. The victim is brought, unarmed and half naked, into a great closed place; the bull, made savage with knife-pricks and the waving of a red cloth, charges, and unless one is quick and skilful, there is an end.

"The game is to seize the bull by the horns and vault over his body. This confuses him, and one can usually recover his footing before the creature knows where he is gone. This leap must be made three times. If the victim is successful in all three he is freed, and the bull is sacrificed in his stead. But often he falls, or is not quick enough, and so is trampled or gored to death."

"Tyr! What a game for children!" cried Ragnarr. "If there is such grim sport before me it would be well that you, who have passed through it, give me further instructions."

"That is one reason why I am here," answered Rala quietly.

THE weather continued fine, and on the third day the wind shifted, making it possible for them to raise the sail. Over the waves the *Gray Wolf* raced, her nose pointing southwestward, the sea-dotting Sporades gleaming far to port. Toward noon of the fourth day they raised the long northern coast of Crete, its shore low, with high, rolling hills behind. Now they began to sight many ships, which crept along the shore, their flashing oars carrying them east, west or north. All were long and high, like the galley of Ambrogeos, black with vermilion bows. Most had a single mast placed amidships; others had two; a few, of unusual length, had three.

Valgard held the steering-oar. Ragnarr stood on the foredeck, his eyes sweeping the shore. Beside him stood Rala, her outstretched arm indicating a small rocky islet directly in their course.

"It is an hour's sail from there to the port of Knossos, where we must land," she said. "It will not be long before they send out ships to meet us, for they keep strict watch along the shore, lest enemies take them by surprise. You would do well to have your answers ready, my lord, for they will ask searching questions."

"I see the glint of spear-points on the beach there," said Ragnarr quietly. "Five men, clustered together and pointing. Look! Two have thrown down their pikes and are running back over the hills."

"To the Knossos road," explained Rala. "We must bear more to the west, master."

"Down sail and out oars!" commanded Ragnarr. "Ha! There go smoke signals from the islet. We shall be greeted soon."

Soon indeed a long black galley thrust her ruddy prow round the point to the northwestward, and bore down upon the *Gray Wolf*, dashing up the spray with beating oars. From the west came a second ship, and from behind the islet a third.

"Now, master, look to yourself," warned Rala, "for these are the outposts of Crete."

On came the first galley till within easy bow-shot, when her starboard oars backed water, and the steering paddles brought her smartly round, athwart the *Gray Wolf's* bow. On the open fore-and-aft bridge that ran between and above the rowers' benches for the entire length of the low undecked waist, stood a company of Cretan archers ready to loose.

The second galley was coming up in support, while the one from the islet stood by, her prow covering the newcomer's broadside. From the high poop of the first black ship rang a stern, challenging voice:

"Who are ye, strangers, and whence come ye? Come no nearer till ye have answered."

Ragnarr shouted to his men to back water, and the *Gray Wolf* lay motionless.

"We come from Troy," he answered, "being guests of Dardanus, its king."

"From Troy!" interrupted the other.

Digitized by Google

"Then have ye news of the Lord Ambrogeos, our prince, who should have come from Troy before now? Have ye seen him there, or passed him on your course?"

Ragnarr started. The Cretan prince had left before him, in a fleeter ship, and under ordinary circumstances ought to have returned at least a day ahead of him.

It was clear that something had happened to delay Ambrogeos. In that case, no one in Crete had heard that the prince had been wounded or by whom. This might save the lives of all his own company, or at least postpone hostile action on the part of the Cretans, till the ship of Ambrogeos returned. In the meantime, thought Ragnarr, perhaps he could meet and kill the Minotaur.

"The Prince Ambrogeos set sail from Troy scarce an hour before us," he answered. "The sea was calm, and it is like that he touched at some port on the way. Doubtless he will be here soon."

"Thanks for your news," came the reply. "Now bide where ye are while we board you. If ye are friends of Dardanus, ye will bear letters with you."

Here was a quandary. No credentials had they received to the Cretan court, yet the galley was already launching her longboat. There was need for quick thought.

"Master!" cried Rala. "The letters to Egypt! They are not sealed, for I saw Kamas open them when you brought your ship up the Scamander."

"But how will letters to Pharaoh help me here?"

"See what is written in them. Maybe they will serve," pleaded the girl.

"But I can not make words of these scratchings," answered Ragnarr. "Our people do not use such signs to express their thoughts."

"But I can read!" protested Rala, and, snatching the pouch from his girdle, she drew from it the folded papyrus and read aloud:

To the great and mighty King of Kings, greeting from Dardanus, King of Troy. He who bears these letters is known to us for a valiant man, wise in command, a skilled mariner, and worthy of trust. We send him to you because of our desire that the commerce between our lands may be increased to our mutual advantage. He is a prince of the Northern Isles, Ragnarr by name, and hundreds of galleys serve him. Use him and confide in him, for I have no secrets from him.

To all our subjects of Troy, and to all who serve the King of Kings, under his will: we commend the bearer to the good offices of all to whom he may present these letters.

To the gracious King of Kings, our humblest services and devoted prayers.

(Signed) DARDANUS, KING OF TROY.

"Girl, the gods have blessed you with wisdom!" gasped Ragnarr. "The old fox feared to set down the name of Egypt, lest chance or the cunning of spies betray him to the Cretan. But how did you guess?"

"Women learn to make the most of any weapon," answered Rala.

Ragnarr took his stand in the port bow as the boat from the Cretan ship drew alongside. A gray-haired captain came nimbly over the *Gray Wolf's* low gunwale. He was of a type far different from the gay officers of Ambrogeos's ornate galley.

He wore a leather cap, plain waist-cloth and ankle boots, above which his lower legs were wound with strips of cloth like puttees. The short sword by his side was hafted with bone, and his gnarled old arms were devoid of ornament.

Ragnarr surveyed him with professional approval, and thrust out his hand after the fashion of his race, for he felt that this was a man after his own heart. The officer took the proffered hand, looking up gravely into the Northman's strong young face.

"It is long since Dardanus sent us envoys," he said plainly but courteously. "Therefore you will not find it strange if I ask to see your letters."

"It is your right," answered Ragnarr, and he delivered the papyrus. The captain held it before him, scanning it closely, but raising his eyes from time to time to look searchingly at the Northman. At length he folded it again, placed it against his forehead, and bowed profoundly.

"Prince Ragnarr," he said, "all that is in my power to do for the comfort of yourself and those with you, I will do gladly. It is the custom of Crete that no stranger land till messengers have inquired the will of the king concerning him; but in your case I feel justified in making an exception. If you will grant me the honor, I will remain here with you till the port is reached, and then take you to my own quarters where we will await the messenger's return."

Ragnarr bowed, and the old man spoke a few words in Cretan to an officer in the small boat, which at once pulled back to the long ship. Promptly the Cretan galleys put

Digitized by Google

about and escorted the *Gray Wolf* toward the port.

"My lord," said the gray-haired officer to Ragnarr, "I am the captain of the port, and my name is Kalyntas. You have done me the honor to take my hand, a thing which no prince has ever done before. I shall not forget it. Now might I presume to ask you concerning your people who produce such mighty men and such sturdy craft? Our ships are longer, and because of their shape and spread of sail are certainly swifter, but I never saw a vessel so stanch as this."

"Gladly," answered Ragnarr, and took him over the ship, bidding him note the great width of the clinker-built craft, her shallow draft and low freeboard, the massive, wave-resisting stem, the height of her sail.

"Now your Cretan ships," commented the Northman, "carry canvas at the very top of the mast only, where it loses the best of the wind and plunges the bow too deeply in the water."

"True," said the Cretan. "But what our sails lack in height they make up in width, and with our handy yards and deep keels we can sail close to the wind—not merely run before it. Likewise, our rowers can toss their oars and our marines handle their lances without poking holes through good canvas. Ours are the only ships in the world that do not have to furl sail when going into action."

"How do you fight your ships?" asked Ragnarr.

"With two ranks of marines drawn up along the fore-and-aft bridge—archers on the engaged side, pikemen behind them, with lances long enough to thrust between the bowmen and over the rowers even to the rail. When we come alongside, the rowers let go their oars—each is thonged to its thole-pin—and snatch up pike and shield, sword or ax, ready to board or to repel boarders."

"In our ships," replied Ragnarr, "there are, as you see, fewer oars on a side, and so the rooms—as we of the North call the spaces between the benches—are each large enough for four men, either to sleep or fight in. In battle, one man rows, the second shields him, the third looses arrows at the enemy's ship, while the fourth stands by with shield and spear, or ax. So it is in each room on the fighting side. And as our ships are undecked aft of the forepeak, our men are protected below the waist by the ship's side; above, by their own shields."

"I shall make note of that," commented Kalyntas, "for we lose too many men from leg wounds at long-range fighting. But there is one thing about your craft which seems a weakness. Her planks are attached to the ribs and to each other by wooden pegs, and leather thongs. Surely they must rack and the seams open up, or the thongs fray and wear through. Now our ships are firmly fastened together with bronze rivets, which hold well, and resist corrosion."

"No, we have not replaced a single thong since we left home," answered Ragnarr. "The water tightens them and also swells the wooden pegs, so that they hold the more firmly. Moreover, the thong-bound ship yields like a living thing, writhing through waves that would break a more rigid craft in pieces."

As the two sea-captains thus pleasantly talked professional matters, Kalyntas kept stealing curious glances at Ragnarr's left thigh, till at last he could restrain his curiosity no longer.

"Your pardon, Prince Ragnarr," he asked in some embarrassment, "but that great sword which you carry excites my wonder. Surely it must be somewhat heavy, even for a man of your stature."

"Not so," the Northman replied, "for it is not of bronze."

"Not of bronze!" exclaimed the astonished Kalyntas. 'Of what, then, is it made?"

"I do not know," Ragnarr answered, drawing Tyrfing from its sheath and baring the long gray blade. "I had it from my father, who in turn had it from his. We believe that it was made by Tyr, the war god of our race, for it is manifestly the work of no human smith. See how hard it is; note its strange, gleaming color; try it, and mark how easily it swings."

So saying, he held the sword out to Kalyntas, who brandished and returned it, saying in awed tones:

"It is indeed forged of the bronze of the gods. May my shield never feel its bite."

NOW they entered the harbor of Knossos Port, a mile-wide, open roadstead, shaped like the cup of a lily, whose stem was the Kairatos River flowing down to the sea from the plain of Ida. On either side of the river mouth,

Digitized by Google

their hulls almost touching, their masts resembling a dense forest, the galleys of Crete lay at their moorings; those on the eastern shore discharging cargo, those on the west taking on freight for all the scattered seaports of the Mediterranean.

A clear lane of water marked the channel from the sea to the river mouth, on either side of which stretched the long, busy beaches, dotted with drawn-up ships. On the shore behind, straggled the scattered houses of a little town, built of sunburnt brick with projecting floor-beams, marking the lines of the upper stories.

"Is this your city?" asked Ragnarr, contrasting in his mind the power and grandeur suggested by the swarming galleys with the small, though well-built settlement before them.

"Crete has no cities," answered Kalyntas. "Her children have no need to herd in foul dens, behind high walls, for all the island is their citadel. What you see on the shore here are the quarters of the coast-guard, the offices of customs, and the merchants' warehouses. Our people live on their farms or in small villages, save that the most skilled artisans and all the nobles dwell among the king's household in the great palace, behind yonder hills up the river."

Soon the *Gray Wolf* was beached, lightened, and drawn up on shore, to the tune of a ringing chantey raised by Hjalti the Bard.

As they crossed the beach leading to the road which ran between the custom-house and the two-storied brick barracks, a door in the latter opened and the guard turned out. They were men of the marine corps, dressed like those on Ambrogeos's galley, but less richly, and carrying spears and great tower-shaped leather shields, extending from chin to ankles, heavily bossed with bronze and pointed at the top. As they grounded pikes, a deep bell-like boom came from within, and the flat roof of the barracks was suddenly lined with archers.

"We guard our port well," said Kalyntas.

"I see," replied Ragnarr thoughtfully. "I should find it hard to pass the shore without your escort."

"Without my escort," responded the Cretan, "you would have been sunk before you could reach the harbor."

He signed to the officer of the guard, who bowed and led his men within, while Kalyntas conducted the Northmen to a low, square building to the right of the road. Ragnarr and Rala followed him inside, while the seamen, under the eyes of Valgard, sat down in the shadow of the building.

Within, the captain seated his guests on cool stone benches and clapped his hands. A servant brought them wine in a graceful pitcher of earthenware and poured it out into conical cups of polished steatite. Presently there entered a long-limbed, athletic fellow in loin-cloth and soft, low shoes, to whom Kalyntas, in a few short sentences, gave an account of the strangers and repeated from memory the contents of Dardanus's letter. The messenger bowed and departed through the door. Through the window-opening Ragnarr saw him bounding away, growing smaller and smaller till he became a mere speck in the distance.

For about two hours the men sat talking while Rala filled their cups with the light acid wine. At last they heard the padding of soft-shod feet, and the messenger stood panting before them.

"The King of Kings," he announced, "the all-powerful Minos, Son of the Bull and Lord of the Sea, bids the Captain Kalyntas send the strangers to him, unarmed, and attended by twenty men. Peace be upon you and on them."

Ragnarr rose. "Good captain," he said, "give me leave to place my sword in the ship, if that agrees with your orders."

"Not only you, but all your men may do so," Kalyntas graciously answered.

The Northmen descended to the beached ship and stowed away their arms in the built-in chests; but the prince, looking to see that he was not watched, lifted a plank in the false bottom of the hull and hid away gray Tyrfing, wrapped carefully in a woolen cloak.

Kalyntas was waiting with the escort at the barracks. As the Northmen came up the beach again he shook Ragnarr by the hand and wished them all a pleasant stay in Knossos. The twenty pikemen fell in behind the sailors, and the party took to the stone-paved road.

For about an hour they marched, the tall Northmen finding it hard to keep from outpacing their shorter-legged escort. Presently the officer at their head called out a sharp command, and the marines wheeled to the side of the road and halted, facing a low plateau that rose above the foot-hills at a little distance.

Digitized by Google

Thrice the officer bowed low, while his men prostrated themselves in the dust. In a moment they arose, reformed and took up their march. Asking why they did so, Ragnarr was told that in the heart of this plateau lay buried the first Minos, whose father was the god incarnate as a bull.

"For which reason," the officer added, "all the kings of our land are called sons of the bull; and therefore the bull is held in reverence among us."

Now the road wound between the hills, and as they reached the crest of the range, the Northmen raised a cry of wonder. Before them stretched a wide plain, extending from the olive-clad slopes about them to the high, far-away mountains. In the middle distance rose a broad, low knoll, crowned with the most wonderful sight the seafarers had ever seen. Like some snow-capped headland of their own northern shores, a gleaming mass of high stone buildings covered the surface of the knoll, extending without a break from the rise of the western slope over and down to the sparkling river girding the hillside on the east. Ragnarr stood rooted to the ground, his eyes wide with wonder. At last he turned to the Cretan officer, marvel and admiration in his heart.

"With these eyes I have seen it!" he exclaimed. "In all the earth there is no king so great as Minos. But why is so noble a palace as this unfortified?"

"Broad Knossos needs no forts," replied the other. "Her countless galleys are her walls."

CHAPTER X

MINOS

DOWN the slope and through the dusty plain they marched, the northern face of the palace looming larger and larger before them. It was fully four hundred feet long, four stories high in the west and center, and five in the east wing. Now the highway was joined by another road, and here they saw the one sign of defensive construction which guarded the great treasure-house of Knossos: a small bastion dominating the roads just without the principal gate.

Ragnarr was surprised to notice that his company was not even challenged as it passed; the unhelmeted guards, lounging in the doorway and leaning over the parapet, contrasted sharply with the alert, well-drilled smartness of the marines who accompanied the Northmen. Their officer read the expression on the stranger's face.

"The palace guard," he said contemptuously. "Younger sons of the nobles, too lazy to join the navy. It is a volunteer service, in which they get the chance to display embroidered uniforms and jeweled weapons before the ladies."

They entered the great north gate, with its flanking sentry-boxes, and here, too, passed unchallenged into a straight narrow corridor, extending as far as the eye could reach. Down its cool, dim length the officer led them, and up a long flight of stairs. The walls on either side of them were of great blocks of limestone, perfectly cut and fitted, like the long, stepped bases of the numerous wooden pillars which supported the stone ceiling on cypress beams laid across their flat, squared capitals.

On the left-hand wall stood out in bold relief the life-sized figure of a bull, its horns laid back, and its prominent rock-crystal eye glaring at the newcomers most naturally. The strange story of the god incarnate as a bull recurred to Ragnarr's mind, and this effigy impressed him ominously.

On the upper level the passageway opened into a little hall, its roof supported by slender columns at the sides. Passing between these they emerged into a vast rectangular court, paved with smooth stones and open to the sky. For nearly two hundred feet this indoor plain extended before their marveling eyes, the eastern and western wings of the palace forming its towering sides. Here their guide halted them, and pointed to a columned hall which they could see through its wide, pillared entrance.

"This is the guest-hall," he informed the prince. "Your men will be cared for here. The maiden must go with them, for the king will wish to speak with you alone."

Ragnarr nodded and directed his followers to enter the quarters prepared for them. Rala cast a quick glance at him, but turned away and went with her companions. The marines remained in the court, standing at ease near the door of the guest-hall, while their officer conducted the northern prince to the presence of the king.

As Ragnarr followed his guide his mind was filled with mingled emotions. Surrounded by the many-storied grandeur of this mighty capitol, he was oppressed with the sense of a power and majesty greater

Digitized by Google

than he had ever known or could now define.

A few more steps and he must come before the presence of the king who ruled this wondrous edifice, and from it dominated the wide seas with his navies. With what reception would he meet who had dared to strike down, perhaps slay, the son of this mighty monarch? When he had learned that Ambrogeos's ship had not yet returned, all had suddenly seemed easy, for he knew that he would be safe for a time, perhaps long enough to accomplish his object. But now, the thought came to him that it would have been easier to meet this king with a bold front, acknowledge his deed and claim the privilege of expiating it by combat with the Minotaur. He could not do this now, for the sake of his men in the guest-hall. He must be discreet, avoid incautious answers and play for time. All this was foreign to the Northman's frank nature, and the thought of it seemed somehow to unnerve him.

His guide plucked at his sleeve.

"Here, my lord," he said, pointing to the right.

Ragnarr turned, and, looking beyond three square stone pillars, saw a small antechamber, through which a narrow doorway led into a room beyond.

"Enter," the officer prompted him. "You are expected."

As Ragnarr stepped between the pillars, his embarrassment slipped from him. In striking down Ambrogeos, he reflected, he had done no more than right, and he had no reason now to be abashed before this king, whom Dardanus had named tyrant and evil-doer.

The young Northman entered boldly, strode through the narrow door beyond and found himself in the presence of two men of striking appearance. One sat on a beautifully carved and molded gypsum throne in the middle of the north side of the room; the other, an elderly man of comfortable girth, sat facing the other on an ornate chair of gilded wood. On the laps of both rested a gaming board: a blazing marvel of crystal and ivory disks on a background of gold, silver, and blue enamel.

As Ragnarr entered the older man rose, withdrew the board without displacing the jeweled counters, and sat down on one of the stone benches that flanked the throne.

Like some strange statue, King Minos sat on his ancient throne and eyed the tall stranger. Ragnarr gazed fearlessly back into the stern, dark eyes, noting the cruel lines about them and at each corner of the thin lips. Bushy black brows met in a single bar below the high, arched forehead, crowned with grizzled but still thick and wavy hair which fell in long curls over the shoulders. A golden chain of iris pattern was looped across the naked chest. A light gold coronet encircled the sea-king's head surmounted with a single iridescent peacock plume. Draped about his shoulders and flung backward a scarlet cape, thrice dipped in murex-dye, protected him from the chill contact of the stone.

At last King Minos spoke. "Give me your letters," he said in a deep, rich voice.

Ragnarr drew the papyrus from his pouch and handed it to the monarch, who perused it closely.

"Why did you pass by Crete to go to Troy?" he demanded suddenly.

Ragnarr realized the unwisdom of confessing that he had never heard of Crete, the mistress of the seas, till he learned of her existence from the lips of Dardanus.

"O king!" he answered, "for generations my people have traded up the great rivers that flow into our northern seas, and down the other rivers that flow southward into the Euxine. Thence they have borne their wares overland to Mycenæ, while folk akin to us have drifted on rafts down the Straits to Troy. Mycenæ has long been our market, but of late our merchants have been ill-treated there, cheated, and, if they protested, beaten and sent in shame and poverty back over the long trail to starve or freeze. Therefore it came to my mind that I might find the sea road to Troy, and develop new markets there. I knew the way as far as the straits which join the western ocean to this inland sea, which I believed would lead us to our goal. It was even so."

The king stroked his shaven chin, his golden wristlet flashing in the light.

"Methinks I have heard of you before," he said. "But did you not know that I hold the commerce of the Mediterranean in the hollow of this hand, and that it had been prudent to bring your project to my ears first of all?"

"I know it now," was the answer.

A faint, cold smile flickered over the lips of Minos.

"So Dardanus thought it wise to send

Digitized by Google

you to me," he said. "It was a good thought."

Then his eyes narrowed and he demanded sharply—

"What was this mutual advantage which the King of Troy hoped your services might bring to us?"

"I do not know," Ragnarr replied most truthfully.

"You do not know? A man such as you does not sail on an errand unknown to him. You can see, from this letter—" and he held the papyrus out to the Northman—"that there must have been some plan; yet you tell me that you do not know what it is?"

"I have said so," responded Ragnarr, somewhat nettled. "Moreover, I do not understand these scratchings, and if I did, was it my place to make my own what had been entrusted to me? Doubtless your wisdom will suggest a way in which a king's son, with threescore men and a good ship may be of service to you."

"I have galleys of my own, as you have seen," Minos answered meaningly. "But it is true that I have no men such as yours, if they resemble you."

He paused and wrinkled his forehead. "Let me see. My vassal, Dardanus, says in this writing that you have many ships, yet my captain of the port announces that you came with but one. Are the others all in your own land?"

"Even so."

"And that is how far? From the Isle of Mines, let us say, for my ships often voyage there for tin."

"From our home to the Isle of Mines we were forty-two days on the sea, but the winds were contrary. My father has made the voyage in ten, when strong winds favored."

Minos considered deeply. His high-built galleys were ill designed for the northern seas, and he never dared risk more than a few ships each year on the long voyage to the Isle of Mines, which we know as Britain. These northern ships must indeed be stanch, as Kalyntas had reported to him by messenger. The king turned to the old man near him.

"Rhamnes," he said, "set down those figures."

Rhamnes was a thick-waisted, wrinkled man, with very large eyes, shaven crown, and curious little artificial beard; for like many other Cretan priests of the time, he was Egyptian by birth, and clung to the customs of his native land. He drew from the folds of his waist-cloth a reed pen and a scroll of papyrus. Dipping the pen in a clay ink-bottle at his girdle, he wrote.

The king's head rested on his hand. His eyes were closed, his brain busy. Suppose there were sufficient profit in the matter for this stranger, it might be possible to do much with the fleets of which he boasted.

With these stanch galleys, manned by northern crews, plying between the distant lands and Crete, the Isle of Mines could be made to yield the sea-king all its output, many times more than he could carry in his own frailer craft. He could plant colonies there and in the rich lands to the southeastward. He could draw to himself all the commerce of the north, cutting it off from his none too obedient colony of Mycenæ and from Troy, and so undermining their growing power. Crete, already the richest empire of the earth, would far outshine even Egypt, and the mercenaries he could hire would make his land invincible. Expansion, the ambition of his long and successful reign, might be possible on a greater scale than ever before.

But it would not do to let the stranger know these thoughts; he might not prove a docile tool.

"It may be," said Minos in gracious tones, "that you can serve me. I may also be able to serve you, Prince Ragnarr. In the meantime, consider this poor dwelling as your own." Three knocks resounded on the pavement of the antechamber. The priest went out, and returned with one of the palace-guard, a wasp-waisted youth, whose long curls reeked of perfume. He said a few words in Cretan to the king, who merely nodded and made a curt sign of dismissal. But the priest seemed to be deeply agitated, and regarded Ragnarr with evident displeasure.

"There is a girl among your men in the guest-hall," said the king to Ragnarr. "May I ask where you met with her?"

"It chanced that I was able to save her from some rough fellows in Troy, and she has served me ever since." As he said this Ragnarr remembered that Rala had been a fugitive from Crete.

"Do you value her highly?" asked Minos.

"I should be ill pleased if any harm came to her," the young man replied.

Digitized by Google

The King exchanged glances with the priest who was smiling unctuously.

"I had intended to ask your majesty," continued Ragnarr, "if it would be possible to find a suitable lodging for her, for she can not stay alone among men."

"I will arrange for her," said Minos, smiling.

"I pray your Majesty to see that she comes to no harm," Ragnarr urged bluntly. "She has tasted my bread, and her friends are my friends, her enemies my enemies." He looked squarely, almost challengingly at them. Minos arose and answered graciously: "She shall be well lodged and tenderly treated, Prince Ragnarr. The worshipful Rhamnes here shall look to her himself."

The priest bowed and went out, a gleam of triumph in his eye.

"As for yourself," the king continued, "you are weary and stained with travel. I shall assign you rooms as spacious as these, and not ill-appointed. Tomorrow we celebrate the feast of the goddess, and you must honor us with your presence at the games."

Taking his guest by the arm Minos led him toward the doorway, guarded by painted dragons. Beside it sparkled a little fountain, its waters irradiated by the light from a wide air-shaft opening directly above. Here the king clapped his hands and a servant entered.

"Conduct Prince Ragnarr to his apartments," the king commanded, and raised his hand in token that the audience was over.

Out into the central court, through the first door to the right, and up a flight of broad stone steps, Ragnarr followed the servant to the second floor. There the menial drew back the embroidered hangings of a curtained door, revealing a long chamber furnished with low stone seats, a gypsum couch piled high with soft cushions, and a cedar chest set with blue plaques representing hunting scenes.

Built into the north wall was a stone basin, into which water flowed from a terra-cotta pipe in the wall above, and from which the wastage was carried away by another pipe in the bottom, descending through the floor. A wide recess beside it proved to be a complete bathroom, well drained in similar fashion. Marveling at the luxury of these strange devices, Ragnarr kicked off his leather shoes and let the cool water flow gratefully over his weary feet.

CHAPTER XI

THE GAMES

RISING at sunrise as was his wont, Ragnarr dressed and descended to the great court. Just as he reached the pavement a door to the right of the staircase was thrust open and a woman stepped out. She was above the average height for a Cretan, with sinuous, rounded figure, and a slender waist tightly laced in, and bringing into greater prominence her shapely shoulders and curved hips.

Her high-sleeved bodice, open at the breast, showed the edges of a net-like chemise; she wore a short flounced skirt, and a head-dress resembling a miter, and surmounted by a golden tiara.

Her features were delicately but strongly formed, her brown eyes were fringed with sweeping lashes, and her dark hair cascaded luxuriantly down about her shoulders. Trim ankles and tiny feet, encased in soft leather slippers, showed beneath the wide hem of her skirt. The girl—for she could hardly have been above twenty years—returned the Northman's gaze fearlessly, as one who knows and is satisfied with her position.

Passing her with a courteous inclination of the head, Ragnarr strode across the wide court and in through the pillared entrance of the guest-hall. His men sat on built-in benches along the wall, the tables before them loaded with food in vessels of porcelain and polished stone. Huge platters were heaped with roast ox and sheep, while earthenware jars, finely painted, supplied the light wine which servants kept pouring into the conical beakers set in round holes before every place.

As Ragnarr entered, all rose with a thunderous shout of welcome, while old Valgard hastened to lead the prince to the place of honor, where he addressed his followers in their native tongue.

"All's well so far," he assured them. "I am the honored guest of Minos, and you, I see, are well cared for. We have but to keep silence and—" here he looked meaningly at the row of brimming cups—"beware of too much wine."

"We may be well, master," broke in Valgard, "but how is it with Rala? You had not been gone an hour when she was led away by a fat old carle, whom she did not

Digitized by Google

seem glad to see. I was minded to twist his neck, and would have done so but the little one said he was an old friend, who meant her no harm. Yet she did not look as if she rejoiced at meeting him again, and I wish I had let him feel my fingers."

"Rala is safe," answered Ragnarr. "The king himself assured me she would be well treated."

"Good," said the old man, his face clearing. "Now eat, master, for the night is long before fast breaking."

Ragnarr ate heartily, and was on the point of rising when a man entered and stood before them. It was Kalyntas, the captain of the port.

"Well met, Prince Ragnarr!" he cried in bluff greeting.

"Hail, Kalyntas!" Ragnarr responded, and strode over to him, their hands meeting in a hearty clasp. "What do you here? Who stays to keep the port?"

"I am off duty today," answered Kalyntas, "as I am on every feast of the goddess. You may rest assured, however, the port is in safe hands. I have come to offer your company the freedom of Knossos, and in particular to lead them to the theater, where the games are soon to commence."

"Blithely will I go with you," said Ragnarr.

"Not so, for the king himself desires that you sit with him. You stand in his good graces, my prince."

A servant entered, bowed low before Ragnarr, and respectfully beckoned to him to follow. Bidding good-by to Kalyntas, the Northman strode after his guide, down the long corridor by which he had entered yesterday. At the foot of the stair the servant led him to the left, along a second corridor running west.

They came out in the open air before a narrow flight of stone steps guarded by two pikemen and running up to the top of a small bastion. Ascending the steps Ragnarr found himself in the royal box. As he entered, King Minos rose from a stone bench in the front and greeted him cordially.

"You are just in time, Prince Ragnarr!" he exclaimed. "The ceremonial dance in honor of the goddess is about to begin."

He led his guest to the cushioned bench, which was fronted by a low parapet and screened from the sun by a rich awning hung from four posts at the corners of the box. It stood in a reentrant angle, the sides of which were two sloping tiers of broad stone steps, on which sat an audience of perhaps five hundred men. Behind and south of them rose the palace wall, four stories high, its upper windows and numerous balconies filled with gaily dressed ladies in tight bodices and wide skirts, marvelously flounced and furbelowed. The king raised his right hand, and the chattering spectators became silent.

From the western court came tripping a band of dancing girls, dressed in short yellow skirts and white bodices, their dark hair streaming over their shoulders. To the twanging of lyres and the beat of a single drum they circled the smooth dancing floor of the theater, their outstretched hands joined, their white feet and rosy ankles rising and falling in perfect time. The leader, distinguished from the rest by her covered bosom and tall, miter-like head-dress, advanced toward the royal box and bowed. Instantly Ragnarr recognized the girl he had seen in the great court an hour before.

Suddenly the graceful line curved, forming a semicircle about the leader, who danced a whirling figure, spinning about swiftly, arms arched over her head, without advancing in any direction; while the others kept up a slow, rhythmic measure, chanting a solemn hymn in unison. Then the crescent extended its horns until they touched; the leader gradually diminished her pace till she stood poised on tiptoe, arms outspread, the circle of her companions revolving about her, first slowly, then with giddy swiftness. At last, arms outflung, skirts swirling, hair disheveled, the group came to a dead stop, posed for a moment, then filed out to the figure with which they had entered, their mitered leader now in the rear.

About him the spectators burst into applause, but Ragnarr was dumb with surprise and admiration. Minos, observing him closely, asked—"Have you dances of this kind in your land, O Prince of the Northern Isles?"

"Our women have no leisure for such things," the Northman answered naively. "Their time is fully occupied with spinning and weaving, milking the cows and the making of cheese. With us, it is the men who dance. But truly, this was a fair sight, and must be pleasing to your goddess, as it was to us."

"The boxing-match comes next," said the

Digitized by Google

king, repressing a smile. "No doubt it will be more familiar to you. Amyntas, for five years champion of Crete, has consented to meet a young boxer from Mycenæ, in honor of the goddess. See, here they come."

Two men, followed by seconds, entered the arena and made obeisance before the king. The first was Amyntas, a man of about forty years, short and very thick in the shoulders, but still slender and supple in the waist. His nose and lips were battered and misshapen, while his once bushy eyebrows looked like a hedge, through which an army has marched. His opponent could not have been more than half as old, and had weight as well as youth in his favor.

For a moment they faced each other, then the youth sprang forward, leading with his right. The champion stepped aside, and, as the blow whizzed past, feinted with his right and jabbed his left to the young man's stomach. The challenger reeled, and Amyntas followed his advantage with a swing to the jaw. But his thong-bound fist struck the empty air. The youth, dropping all pretense, had dodged and sent his left to the champion's ear.

Amyntas shook his head like a fly-bitten horse, and stepped back. The young man rushed in unwarily and dropped to the ground, hard hit on the point of the jaw. The male spectators, silent till now—for their sympathies were all with Amyntas—burst into wild yells, while from window and balcony fluttered the many-colored scarfs and kerchiefs of the Cretan ladies.

Amyntas stood over his fallen foe, who wisely made no attempt to rise; for the game as practised in Crete was merciless, and the rules permitted the striking of a prostrate man as soon as he stirred. The Mycenæan had had his fill, and the match was over.

The king, rising in his box, proclaimed Amyntas victor, to the renewed delight of the onlookers. The champion swaggered slowly toward the angle and caught the purse of gold which Minos tossed him. Then, throwing the guerdon at the feet of his vanquished rival, Amyntas turned to his trainer, who poured oil over the mighty arms and shoulders, massaged them briskly and examined the bruise on the boxer's ear.

This done, the champion faced the crowd and spread out his arms in an all-inclusive gesture.

"If there be any here who fears not to take a beating, let him come down," he challenged. "Perhaps there is one among you who cherishes the dream of vanquishing old Amyntas. If so, let him speak quickly."

None stirred or spoke. The boxer surveyed them with scornful eyes, scanning all the company, till his eyes fell on the Northmen.

"Ha!" he cried in the traders' patois, "here are stout fellows who will not shrink from a blow. Come down here, one of you, and help me win praise!"

Every sailor rose to his feet, but Hjalti the Bard, thrust himself forward, sweeping those beside him out of the way and strode down into the arena.

"I will give you the beating you long for, boaster!" he roared. "But first take those playthings off your hands. Do you think to hurt me with mittens?"

The boxer smiled and replied with amused contempt:

"You had better put them on yourself if you would not break your knuckles. Before I am done you will not wish I had struck you with bare hands."

THE Northman grunted and held out his own hands to be gloved. Then they faced, Amyntas crouching and guarding himself with his left arm. Hjalti suddenly flung himself on him with a roar of fury. The pugilist side-stepped just in time and stopped the wild rush with a crashing blow.

Down went the Northman, but before Amyntas could bestride him he was up again, incoherent with rage. Thrice he rushed and each time reeled back before the well-placed blows. Then, head down, Hjalti charged blindly at the other's stomach. Amyntas coolly side-stepped, and, as the other blundered by, thrust out one foot and tripped him. As the Northman fell, the champion jabbed down sharply with his left and the luckless bard lay stunned and motionless.

The crowd burst into jeering laughter, till Ragnarr rose, his face flushed and angry, and addressed the king.

"Your Majesty, the bout was fairly won, but he whom your people mock is one of my men, and I can not permit indignity to be heaped upon him. By your leave, I will exchange blows with this fellow for the honor of my race."

"Be prudent," Minos cautioned him. "This seems to be a game you know not,

Digitized by Google

and I would not have you cheapened in my people's sight."

"I have watched both bouts closely," answered the prince. "And I think I have profited by the lesson."

He bowed and left the box, making his way between the seated spectators, who squeezed close together to let him pass. When the crowd saw him leap into the ring and cast off his mantle, they shouted lustily, for they knew well that he stood in favor with the king.

He stripped to the waist, and held out his hands for the gloves. Amyntas looked him over with a professional eye, noting the great height and reach, the mighty shoulders and swelling muscles, hard with the use of weapons and toiling at the oar. This time no scornful smile curled the boxer's lip.

For a full minute they stood confronting each other, neither moving a muscle; then Amyntas feinted with his left, and Ragnarr, whose keen eye read the movement, raised his arm just in time to ward off the terrible right. Without hesitation he stepped in, delivering a terrific body blow that tore through the Cretan's guard, and hammered against his ribs.

Avoiding a clinch with his towering antagonist, Amyntas backed almost to the barrier, so that the Northman's swinging blows fell short. Now Ragnarr began to lose patience and lunge wildly. Suddenly Amyntas rushed, and his right thudded against Ragnarr's jaw. But he might as well have struck the stone facing of the arena wall.

His head cleared by the stinging blow that would have knocked an ordinary man senseless, the Northman clinched and bore his great weight down on the Cretan's shoulders. None interfered, for in these ancient contests, tricks of the wrestling ring played a recognized part.

With a sharp twist, Amyntas broke away, but as he did so a shrewd thrust from the other's open palm set him staggering. Before the boxer could recover his balance Ragnarr's right shot straight to the point of the chin, the whole strength of shoulder, back, and leg behind the blow.

Amyntas thudded to the earth and lay still. The people gave a wondering cry to see the victor of so many battles prostrate at last. But no cheer greeted the conqueror. The overthrower of a cherished idol receives few acclamations.

The wrestling-match followed. A lean and sinewy Egyptian threw three contestants, who were helpless against his cunning skill and cat-like speed. But the fourth was a towering Lybian with bull-neck and thick chest.

The Egyptian struggled in vain against his giant antagonist. Thrice he threw him on his face, but could not turn him over. Then the Libyan took the offensive, and after the other had slipped from hold after hold, caught his light opponent in a mighty grasp, lifted him bodily from the earth, and squeezed him weak and helpless.

Ragnarr's blood was still hot from the bout with Amyntas, and when the king invited him to show his strength again, he accepted eagerly, for here was a sport he knew well. Skill and quickness both were his, and he was a match for the negro even in brute strength. Within six minutes after the first grapple Ragnarr caught the Libyan under the crotch and threw him bodily over his shoulder on to the straw that covered the pavement.

Replacing his upper garments, the prince walked round to the back of the theater and mounted the stair to the royal box. There, standing by the king, he saw the slender girl he had seen in the court that morning, and had recognized as the leader of the dancing maidens. Now, however, she wore a bell-shaped skirt that swept the floor of the box, plaited and ruffled, its rich material exquisitely embroidered. Her low-cut bodice was caught in front with a golden brooch, and the puffed sleeves descended even to her knuckles. Her head was bare, but her long brown locks were now carefully curled and arranged in an elaborate coiffure.

Turning, she saw the Northman, and held out both hands in greeting.

"You are Prince Ragnarr!" she exclaimed, speaking the merchants' dialect with an adorable accent. "I joined my father just in time to see your victory over that base-born Amyntas. It was splendid!"

"It was a foolish act, lady," he answered, "but I could not bear to see him strut above my servant."

"Foolish!" she cried, her splendid eyes flashing. "Words can not tell how I admired it! And your wrestling! You should meet my brother, who is a famous wrestler, though but a child beside your strength. You would like him and he would be devoted to you."

Digitized by Google

The king's interposition saved Ragnarr from a painful moment.

"Perhaps Prince Ragnarr has met your brother, Ariadne," said Minos. "He left Troy only a few hours after Ambrogeos. But you are a little hasty with our guest. Give him a moment to recover; he is not used to your charms."

The princess swept her sire an elaborate curtsy, then turned again to Ragnarr.

"You have come straight from the gods," she announced. "In my brother's absence, I have seen nothing but dainty young nobles and perfumed sons of merchants. Now I see a man—a man who can crush Amyntas and then throw a naked black giant over his head like a doll. But try and find your tongue before we meet tonight at the banquet, O Prince of the Northern Isles!"

And with an even more elaborate curtsy the princess of Crete swept out of the royal box. King Minos rose to his feet and shook his head deprecatingly.

"These modern girls are too much for me, Prince. Let us go in. Kalyntas will see to your fellows."

They descended and entered the palace. Ragnarr left the king at the door of the audience-chamber, where a group of petitioners were waiting, and went up to his own room. Here he found two slaves who had brought him a change of garments, and were tarrying to disrobe him. Waving them aside he threw off his clothes and stepped into the bathroom. The slaves came forward again, intending to raise the heavy jar and pour the cool water over him. But Ragnarr, long used to caring for himself, bade them begone, lifted the massive stone vessel above his head, and sluiced its contents down his hot and perspiring body.

CHAPTER XII

THE VOICE OF THE MINOTAUR

FOR hours after the food was removed, the company sat spellbound at the table, scarce tasting their wine, while Ragnarr told them of the warlike, mysterious North, and repeated the old heroic tales of its people. He spoke of hunting the bear in deep forests, of battles between ships in mountain-girdled fiords, and of strange things which they could not understand: armies creeping on snow-shoes under the stars, and warfare on the ice.

The eyes of bronzed men and radiant women were fixed in wonder on his face. Ariadne, seated beside him, her beautiful neck and shoulders gleaming above her low-cut evening gown of filmy black, listened with rapt attention and shining eyes. Her lips were parted and her breath came in little gasps as he told of some close escape from death, or hinted at dark wizardry that withered the flesh and dried the veins of living men.

At last he finished, and Minos rose from his seat.

"It is time we made sacrifice," the king said in solemn tones. "My daughter, do you, as priestess of the goddess whose holy name you bear, bring forth the sacred image from its shrine."

Ariadne bowed and left the table. Along the torchlit wall she went, the flames reflecting from the jewels on her arms, and passed between the massive pillars, whose square sides bore the symbol of the two-headed ritual ax. The company stood, waiting in awe and silence.

Soon she returned, a stone lamp in one hand, and a small, marvelously carven figure clasped to her breast. This she set upon a stone altar between two columns and placed the lamp before it.

As the clear flame fell on the figure's profile, Ragnarr started in amazement. It was about fourteen inches high, clad like the ladies who stood about him, bare-bosomed and with outstretched arms. Its white face and fierce eyes were set in an unearthly stare, which, with the majestic, diademed head-dress, gave it indeed the aspect of some stern immortal. Now Ariadne stood before the altar, facing the figure of the goddess, and, saving only herself, Minos, and the Northman, the whole assemblage sank to its knees.

"The goddess awaits the sacrifice," intoned the princess in a low, strange voice.

The king stepped to the altar, bearing a golden vessel perfectly fashioned to the shape of a bull's head, but open at the poll and brimming with a dark-colored liquid. He knelt before the altar, holding the vessel high above his head, so that its rim came just below the bosom of the goddess. Now Ragnarr gave a cry of fascinated horror, for from the bosom of Ariadne's bodice glided the evil, blunted head of a serpent, with darting tongue and arched neck.

Slowly the writhing thing crept forward

Digitized by Google

till it rested against the shoulder of the goddess; then, climbing above it, coiled round the outstretched arm. For a moment it remained thus, hissing and running out its tongue, then sunk its snout into the vessel and drank. When it was satisfied, it crept out along the arm again onto Ariadne's wrist outstretched to meet it, and so back into her bosom. She walked slowly from the room, and all the assemblage raised a joyous cry—

"The goddess accepts the sacrifice!"

King Minos rose and with a full sweep of his arm inverted the vessel, pouring its dark contents splashing onto the floor.

"O thou divine, omnipotent mother!" he prayed. "Thou who dost give breath to all that breathe, that dost shelter them a little while, only to take them to Thee again in Thine own good time, accept this sacrifice, the blood of the chosen bull, and be gracious unto thy people! Keep them from death and sorrow, give them the abundance of thy fruitful earth, exalt them above all nations! So may this blood, the accepted sacrifice, satisfy thy thirst, that our blood may be spared!"

Now all rose to their feet, their relief from the tension of the solemn ritual shown by the gaiety of renewed laughter and voices raised in merry conversation. Men and women came together in little groups, chatting light-heartedly. Ragnarr stood aloof, none heeding him in this moment of relaxation from a ceremony which meant so much to all but him, and made him so much the more a stranger to them.

He walked a moment up and down the hall, then passed out between the wooden columns onto the dark portico. It was a soft, fragrant night; the bright moon above him revealed the shimmering cestus of the river girdling the terrace below. He stood there, breathing in the freshness and beauty of the night, the weird eerieness of that which he had witnessed slowly slipping from him.

A light footfall sounded behind him, and a dark-robed, white-shouldered figure came out from the palace. As she passed the pillar that hid him, the moonlight showed her face. It was Ariadne. Gone was the queenly priestess; remained only a young girl, her beauty softened and exalted by the moonlight. He moved slightly and she saw him.

"Prince Ragnarr!" she breathed.

He bowed but did not answer. She came nearer and said, divining his thoughts:

"I do not wonder that you came out here. Is it not strange that the goddess who made all things should not prefer the worship that we pay her thus—" and she pointed to the beauty of the silent dusk, the shimmer of the golden moon—"to the blood of sacrifice, the terror of the crawling adder, and gloomy incantations?"

"The gods are beyond all human understanding, lady," he answered slowly. "In my land also we worship them with blood of cattle and of horses, though not with serpents; and we think that they are best pleased with joy and feasting, not with fear. Our gods are warlike, but one can invoke them with a free, open heart, as one would ask a gift of his fellow."

"You speak of gods," said Ariadne. "Have you no goddess, then?"

"Yes, lady, but of another sort from yours. She is kind and winsome, tender-hearted. Maidens call on her and lovers, and it is said that she answers all righteous prayers."

"Our goddess also is kind and answers the prayers of lovers, when they make sacrifices of flowers to her heavenly aspect."

"Do you worship her with serpents at such times?" asked Ragnarr, his horror rekindling at the thought of the ugly head thrust forth from the bosom of this beautiful woman.

"No, but with doves; the serpent symbolizes her underworld aspect, in which she holds the keys of life and death. But tell me, Prince Ragnarr, did that serpent-rite shock you?"

"It filled me with loathing," replied the frank Northman, "to see that hideous reptile in your breast."

The princess laughed, then suddenly grew grave.

"It is but a symbol," she said, "though it would, of course, seem strange to one of another race. But if I disturb you so in the practise of my worship, I am not so dreadful at other times. In other ways, moreover, this land of ours is a pleasant one, as I hope you have found."

"I have found it a land of kindness and good cheer," answered Ragnarr warmly, "but there is one thing which has caused me much bewilderment. In Troy I heard much of a strange monster in Crete, called the Minotaur; yet since I have been here I

Digitized by Google

have heard nothing of it. I pray you, tell me what manner of creature it may be, and how I may find it, for I wish to see it before I go hence."

Ariadne looked at him strangely.

"I never knew any one to ask to see the Minotaur before," she replied, "and I advise you to dismiss the thought. Moreover, you would do well to say nothing of the matter to any one else, for my father does not care to have it spoken of."

"By my honor!" the Northman cried warmly, "I shall never leave this land till I have seen it!"

"The gods forbid that ever you should see him," said Ariadne fervently, "for if you do, you will never see the pleasant sun again!"

Ragnarr stared at her, surprised by the shudder in her voice.

"You must not ask me of this matter again. It is blasphemy so to speak of it."

"I have sworn," Ragnarr answered stoutly. "If you will not help me, I must find another way."

"I can not help you," she replied sadly.

He turned his back to her, somewhat offended, and for a space there was silence. Then——

"Are you angry with me?" she asked reproachfully.

Still he said nothing.

"Oh!" she cried earnestly. "Can you not see? You are my father's guest; we have talked and made merry together, you and I, and you ask me to do this thing that would mean your death!"

She moved closer to him, and her bare arm touched his sleeve.

"You are young and strong and too brave to die!"

He turned and saw that there were tears in her beautiful eyes.

"Give up this mad design," she pleaded. "Do not ask me, who would be your friend, to become your murderess!"

As he looked down into the girl's face, so lovely in the moonlight, a cloud seemed to come between him and all that he had planned and striven for. His purpose seemed a half-forgotten dream; the experiences of the days so newly gone were faded, and even the thought of Ilia grew dim. He saw only the lovely, tear-stained face of Ariadne, heard only her imploring voice. His eyes gazed deeply into hers, and for a moment his senses reeled. Then, before he could stir, before his tongue could speak the wild thoughts that surged within him, from somewhere within the palace, a muffled cry, half roar, half shriek, burst forth, reechoed, and died shudderingly away.

"What was that?" he exclaimed.

Averting her face, as if fearing some unknown evil, Ariadne faltered, "The voice of the Minotaur!"

Instantly the charm was broken, memory came surging back and drove away temptation.

"It can not be as you desire, Princess," said Ragnarr firmly. "I must keep my oath."

CHAPTER XIII

AMBROGEOS HAS HIS WAY

AMBROGEOS awoke in the gilded cabin of his ship, the light filtering in rosily through the costly hangings. For five days he had tossed and raved in delirium, and now regained consciousness for the first time. He gazed languidly about him, with the indifferent contentment of his weakened state, and his eyes fell on the naked slave who was gently fanning him.

"Where am I?" asked the prince dreamily.

The slave laid his finger on his lips, put his fan aside and left the cabin. Ambrogeos pondered idly on the meaning of this. A shadow fell across the threshold, and Rhodonthos entered, his face lighting happily at the sight of his prince restored to consciousness.

"Where am I?" repeated Ambrogeos, this time somewhat pettishly.

"In the harbor of Mitylene, my lord," the admiral replied. "You were grievously hurt, and fever set in, so that we had to bring you into this sheltered port where the ship's motion would not disquiet you."

The prince looked puzzled.

"Hurt!" he exclaimed, raising his head from the deep cushions.

With an instant cry of pain, he sank back again.

"Lie still, I beseech you, Highness!" the old man admonished. "You will cause the wound to reopen, and the fever will return."

"But how was I wounded and where?" Ambrogeos inquired impatiently.

"Be calm and I will tell you," began Rhodonthos. "The Princess Ilia——"

Digitized by Google

"Ilia!" cried the prince. "Now I remember all! That vile barbarian! Tell me, Rhodonthos, did he escape?"

"Even so, my lord, for Dardanus dared not oppose him, if indeed he desired to. But be calm, I pray you, or I shall have to leave your presence."

Ambrogeos lifted his head again, and, stifling a groan, struggled to a sitting position.

"Be it so!" he cried fiercely. "Leave me at once, order out the oars, weigh anchor, and urge the *Dolphin* back toward Troy as swiftly as she will fly. I have words to say to Dardanus that will not wait."

"But, my gracious lord," protested the admiral, "once on the sea again, your sickness may return. What shall I say to the king if I bring his son home to him dead?"

"Say that I would have it so!" Ambrogeos commanded. "Now go, and if we are not sailing northward in an hour, you will find me far from calm, for I shall seek my own death."

The admiral bowed and departed in gloomy resignation. But his forebodings proved groundless, for the mild, fresh sea breezes brought strength and color to the prince so fast that he could be carried to the fore-deck on the afternoon of the second day.

As the vermilion prow rounded the cape and clove the waters of the Trojan port, a savage gleam lighted his deep-sunken eyes. As soon as his weary crew could bring the *Dolphin* to the Scamander's mouth, Ambrogeos ordered a litter made ready and waited with eager impatience while they glided up the winding stream. As before, they had ignored the shore-watch, and Ambrogeos smiled grimly as, from the high prow of the galley, he watched the runners dash off along the bank toward the city. A word from him and their swift course would be stopped with a flight of arrows, but he knew well that the king would not dare resist him, and the word was not spoken.

Exhausted, coated with dust, the swiftest runner darted into the royal chamber.

"The Cretans have returned!" he panted. "Even now their ship lies opposite the Western Gate!"

The cup fell crashing from the king's hand, its contents splashing the hem of his robe.

"So soon?" he muttered.

Day after day he had lived in terror of this news, but never had he dreamed the avenger would come so swiftly. This was the sixth day—how could ships go and return in so short a time? Then, through his terror, a thought took shape and grew, and slowly the color returned to his face.

"Ship, did you say?" he queried. "Was there but one?"

"But one, O king!" the kneeling man replied. "The same that left on the last night of the Fair."

Dardanus rose and walked slowly to the throne-room, thinking swiftly. He knew this matter meant some evil to him, but what, he could not tell. Not war, or Minos would have sent a fleet. Not a demand for tribute, for it was not the time, nor would the prince's galley have come on such an errand.

It must be that Ambrogeos had recovered and returned to claim the Northmen at his hands. But the Northmen were gone, and what mercy might he expect who had let them go, instead of throwing them in chains till Crete should demand them? The old King sighed heavily and sat himself wearily upon his throne. Surely no man had suffered more at the hands of fate than he. No slavery was half so hard as his.

The curtains parted, and Acharsis bowed before him.

"O king," he announced, "the Cretan Prince Ambrogeos asks an audience. Shall he be admitted?"

"Admit him," replied the despairing king.

The captain flung the curtains wide, and, leaning on the shoulders of Rhodonthos, his blazing eyes glowing terribly in his wan face, Ambrogeos entered.

"Where are the barbarians?" he cried in menacing tones.

Dardanus struggled against the panic in his breast and announced with seeming composure: "Most gracious prince, hardly had you sailed when the barbarians departed from my land. I did not stop them, because their accursed leader swore by his gods that he would sail to Crete and slay the Minotaur. It must be that he lied, else would you have taken them when they landed and slain them."

"To Crete!" Ambrogeos cried in a voice of savage triumph. "Then the goddess has indeed delivered them into our hands. You did well to let them go and I forgive your offense. Know, Dardanus, that we did not

Digitized by Google

hold toward Crete, but sailed to the isle of Lesbos. I come for two purposes. One, I see, is already fulfilled; the other I know you will consent to. Tomorrow at the fourth hour, the Princess Ilia must go with me. We should reach Knossos at the close of the third day thereafter; and on the fourth, I shall take your daughter to wife and give the Northmen to the Minotaur as a wedding sacrifice!"

Dardanus gasped, but having learned the wisdom of the oppressed, he considered carefully before making reply. Ambrogeos, he reasoned, was placated by the certain knowledge that his enemy was trapped; he might, then, be susceptible to argument.

"Would it not be wiser," he urged, "to hold the marriage here, this night? In that case, your royal father can not withhold my daughter from you. If you take her unwed to Crete, how can you be sure of the king's consent, seeing that you have not won the Egyptian princess yet?" He smiled amiably, knowing that to gain his point, to become the father-in-law of the crown prince of Crete, would make himself and his city secure forever. "When you return, you can say that the king of Troy sends his daughter as a handmaid to the Princess Ariadne."

"It may not be," Ambrogeos answered. "I am resolved, for the sake of my revenge, that my enemy shall die on the day of my marriage. But I swear to you that no harm shall befall your daughter, for I love her and shall make her my wife in honorable wedlock. As for my father, I shall tell him that if he forbids this marriage, I will have nothing to do with Egypt. Now let the Princess Ilia be informed, but do not tell her that her lover is in Crete, or that danger threatens him. I shall await her on my ship, at the fourth hour. Now farewell, for I must prepare for her coming."

So saying, he turned, supported by Rhodonthos, and went out.

THE morning came, and Ilia, accompanied by two waiting-women, mounted the raised gangway of the prince's ship. Ambrogeos stood by the gunwale, and, taking her hands in his, led her to a splendid cabin at the stern, its purple awning interwoven with threads of gold.

Soft couches were spread for her and her women, and the planks were hidden beneath thick-piled carpets. A heavy chest of cedar set at one end of the cabin served to hold her robes and jewels, or as a table when the sea was calm.

The anchor was weighed, the prow turned down-stream, and the oars tossed and let fall. Ilia leaned over the railing, her sad eyes fixed on the walls of Troy in a long gaze of farewell. Ambrogeos sat beside her, but she did not heed him.

Now they rounded a curve and the crowned, majestic city was forever lost to her sight. The fair green plain receded with cruel swiftness.

At last they came to the Scamander's mouth, and, as the sails were raised to the mastheads, the lithe ship leaped into the blue waters of the bay. The girl looked for the last time on the land of her birth, the beloved land of home and parents, of familiar sights and faces, the land where she had found and lost the dearest of all possessions, love.

Long after the shore of the Troad had slipped beneath the horizon, Ilia looked backward, with sore heart and tear-dimmed eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SACRILEGE

BETWEEN the overhanging trees a little company of men and women followed the winding forest path, till they came out into a wide, grass-grown glade. At the end of this rose a grove of oaks and beeches, shadowing a muddy pool, its shores trampled by many small hoofs. The sun beat down into the clearing bright and hot, but the tiny pool stood ever in the dark green shade.

Leading the merry band were a tall, powerfully built man and a slender woman—Ragnarr and the Princess Ariadne. Behind them came the others, nobles and ladies of the Cretan court. The women wore light, wide skirts descending to the knee, short-sleeved, low-cut bodices, and strips of leather wound from shoe to knee.

All were armed, men and women alike, with bronze-headed boar-spears and broad-bladed knives. Ariadne alone carried a bow and quiver over her shoulders.

"This is the spot!" the princess cried.

With sighs of relief, the women sank down upon the grass. The Cretan youths grouped about them, and soon the circle was engaged in merry conversation. Rag-

Digitized by Google

narr looked down at them in deep contempt, for with him hunting was a serious occupation. He turned to Ariadne, who still stood beside him.

"Princess," he said, "if your people watch in this manner, the boar will be upon them before they dream of danger."

"There is no danger yet," she replied. "The beaters always head off the larger beasts first, and drive the tuskless pigs for the ladies to kill with their light spears."

"That is well," said Ragnarr, "and I trust the women are wise enough to seek shelter when the time comes."

"Oh, then the men are supposed to protect us. But when a tusker comes, you need not trouble about me, for I am a famous huntress and my arrows are sharp."

Ragnarr held up his hand and listened intently.

"They come!" he announced, and the party sprang to their feet.

Soon the wind, which blew toward them, carried faint shouting to their ears. Along the windward edge of the wood they gathered in little knots about the openings of the boar-runs, which the beaters had strengthened by weaving the twigs of the close-set undergrowth together.

Nearer and louder came the cries, less musical and more confused. At last the hunters heard the drumming of hoofs. Out of the farthest run shot a lean, small shape; there came a low thud and a piercing squeal, and the pig, a scarce-weaned youngling, fell bleeding, transfixed by two slender spears.

"First blood to me!" triumphantly cried a pert-faced girl in green. "The spear in his side is mine!"

"No, yours is sticking in his rump!" shrilled a lass scarce in her teens.

The other raised her voice in protest, but at that moment a shout rang out and another pig darted from one of the runs, between the hunters, who had been watching the strife over the first victim. A shriek and a thud, and a girl lay on the ground, while the pig sped on his way unharmed. The breathless maiden was helped to her feet amid peals of laughter, and it seemed as if the terrified animal would escape, when the disappointed claimant of the dead pig hurled her spear and brought him down. A loud shout went up, for the cast was a good forty feet, and a rare one for a woman.

Now all settled down to watch again, spears raised. In unheeding eagerness, two girls crowded in front of Ragnarr and the Princess, hard by the main opening.

"Back, little fools!" cried Ariadne imperiously.

But as she spoke, the two, with a cry of fear, leaped back, throwing her down, and ran screaming in opposite directions.

With a drum-like beating of hoofs, a huge boar, savagely tusked, charged from the run straight for the prostrate Ariadne. Ragnarr threw himself forward, his spear leveled, and met the boar with a thudding shock. But his foot slipped and the spear struck high, its broad blade gashing the bony shoulder, and the haft flying out of his hand. He drew his knife as the beast turned and ripped at him with its sharp tusks, tearing his high Cretan boot just above the ankle. He lunged, but the brute turned aside and the blow missed.

With tusk and blade, the two fought fiercely about the glen. At last, just as Ragnarr got his knife in the boar's flank, an arrow whizzed past him, burying itself deep in the brute's heart. It sank down, stricken to death. Ragnarr looked round, to see Ariadne approaching, bow in hand.

"It is well that you were by me, Prince Ragnarr," she said without a trace of excitement.

"It is well for me that you are brave and a good archer," he answered enthusiastically. "Mine was a well-placed blow enough, but would not have been his last. It was your shaft that sped him."

A burly, grizzled huntsman came toward them, bowing low before the princess.

"The sport is over, your Highness," he reported. "Here come the beaters." And he pointed down one of the forest lanes.

"Take them to the lodge," she replied, "and give them money and refreshment."

The forester swung off between the trees.

"Where is Phantos?" inquired the princess, missing a certain young noble from the gathering company.

All looked about, scanning each others' faces, as if expecting to find the missing one there.

"He was here but now," a plump, rosy-cheeked girl spoke out, "for he was teaching me how to hold my spear."

A great laugh went up and she hid behind her nearest neighbor, blushing furiously.

"Look!" shouted one of the hunters.

Digitized by Google

"'Tis he! He has left off chasing pork to hunt for birds!"

He pointed to a tall tree, where, half-hidden among the branches, the missing Phantos hung. He had fled from the tusker's charge, and in his haste to descend undiscovered, had caught the slack of his gaily embroidered loin-cloth on a projecting stub. With both hands he clung, his legs kicking wildly as he strove to free himself. Men and maidens burst into shrieks of laughter; but Ariadne's face went cold and stern, and Ragnarr was sick with disgust.

"Let us go, my lady," he said. "If he were my man, I would pin the coward to his perch till the ravens stripped his bones."

He turned away, and Ariadne followed. Seeing their princess's disapproval, the courtiers grew hushed and frightened and whispered guiltily among themselves.

Back through the forest ways they went, till they came out into a hedged clearing, at the far side of which an old woman, wrinkled and bent with years, was gathering herbs into her coarse apron. Suddenly the thick hedge behind her parted, and, thrusting the dense branches easily aside, a huge milk-white bull rushed toward her, trailing a broken rope.

On it came in great bounds, while the little group of nobles stood still with fright. Unheeding, the old woman remained with her back to the charging bull, tugging at a tough-rooted weed.

Ragnarr sprang forward, covering the space between in two great leaps, and thrust his boar-spear deep into the monster's flank. Bellowing, it toppled over in mid-bound, and rolled on its mighty side, stone-dead.

The old woman turned in amazement, saw Ragnarr wiping his spear, and the dead bull in its blood; and straightway sank down on her knees, her face set in a look of unutterable horror. The Northman started to rejoin his companions, but stopped in blank amazement. On the face of each was the same breathless horror; all stared at him as at something evil. At last one of the hunters pointed at him with his spear.

"He has slain the sacred bull!" shouted the Cretan hoarsely. "Kill him!"

Ragnarr was astounded. He could not comprehend the situation, but he knew the meaning of the words. He set his left foot forward, charged his spear, and with jaws clenched, awaited the attack. But none came. With a swift bound, Ariadne stood at his side, bow in hand and arrow on string.

"Cowards!" she cried. "You let him face the maddened boar unaided, and now, because he unwittingly broke the customs of our land, you crowd about him with hostile spears! Truly there is safety in numbers. You, Orothes, who bade your fellows slay him, why do not you step forth alone and meet him in single combat?"

Orothes shrunk back, cowed by her bitter words and fierce gaze.

"He has broken the law of the land, and the law, not you, shall deal with him. Go you before, you dogs that bay and snarl, but attack only in packs, and I will bring him in. If one of you turn back or point a spear at him, that man shall feel my arrow in his side!"

Silent, abashed, they obeyed her.

She turned to Ragnarr and said sorrowfully:

"It is a hard thing to see a brave man so rewarded. I fear I can not save you from the penalty of this sacrilege; but, oh, believe that I admire the courage of your deed, and that I will help you if I can. Come now with me. You can not escape from this island, and to try it would only mean the death of all your men."

Slowly, wonderingly, he followed her. This was indeed a strange land, where death might spring at one undreamed of, even beneath the shelter of a monarch's favor. As they walked, Ariadne explained the situation.

The bull was sacred to the goddess, and a white bull was also held to be the reincarnation of the god, her son, who first took fleshly shape as the father of the first Minos by a mortal woman, a union typified by the Minotaur. This particular bull, because of its milky color and monstrous size, was held in the greatest veneration. The penalty for killing it was the second form of the sacrifice: the slayer must face, unarmed, a savage bull before the assembled people. If he survived three leaps over its terrible horns, he was free; if not, his body was cast into the unmarked pit where those of common criminals were thrown.

"You must surrender yourself without a struggle," Ariadne cautioned him. "I have assumed the burden of answering for you. I will implore my father to choose one of the smaller, gentler beasts for your ordeal; that is as much as I can do. He will

Digitized by Google

doubtless consent, for he seems to have a high regard for you."

"You have done much for me, princess," Ragnarr replied. "I will not forget."

"Do not," she answered, and turned her face away.

When they came to Knossos, the news had already arrived. From the great southern gateway of the palace, a company of soldiers surrounded them.

"Seize the sacrilegious wretch!" ordered the captain, and his men rushed at Ragnarr. But Ariadne held up her hand.

"Let be," she said sternly. "I answer for him. Conduct him to his chamber, Thalas, and keep him safely. His men shall be confined to their lodgings. Let none lay hands on this man, for I will have words with him who disobeys. If any challenge the order, say that the priestess of the goddess issued it and will maintain it."

The captain bowed and led Ragnarr away.

CHAPTER XV

THE MADNESS OF RAGNARR

THE din of many voices rose and fell through the great central court. The balcony surrounding its vast rectangle was packed with men and women, close-seated on rising tiers of wooden benches. While, story above story, the broken lines of smaller galleries were lined with eager faces.

Below, the pavement was covered deep with white sand from the shore, and, barricading the doors and entries of the lower level, ran a protecting wall of thick, rough planks. At the south end alone, a narrow corridor opened its shadowy mouth; and two chambers of the western wing were guarded only by their massive wooden doors studded with nails of bronze. One of these chambers opened into the guest-hall; the other was a cheerless guard-room.

There came a sound of clattering hoofs on stone, and the voices of the crowd swelled into one surging, clamorous roar. All eyes were strained toward the open corridor. Out of its dusk a horned head suddenly appeared, and a great tawny bull lumbered into the courtyard, urged by the goads of four sturdy attendants. Above the deep-toned shouting of the men rang the shrill voices of women; hands were frantically clapped, and the walls threw back the dissonant uproar.

Now the heavy door of the guard-room was thrown open, and a soldier thrust a slight figure into the arena. It was a boy, scarce fifteen years old, his bare limbs quivering with fear and excitement. His arms were spare and sinewy; his slender calves were wound with leathern strips, and but for these and the narrow cloth about his loins, he was naked.

The bull stood opposite him, a full twenty paces off, its tail switching its heaving flanks, eyes rolling in uncomprehending terror of the unwonted surroundings and the clamor on all sides.

For a time the boy and the beast eyed each other across the intervening sand; then an attendant drove his pointed goad deep into the creature's flank. With a snort of pain it turned, saw its tormentor, and gave chase. The fellow ran swiftly toward the guard-room door, which opened to receive him, and shut with a clang. The bull stood balked, its forefeet planted wide before the door, blowing and snorting angrily.

Clinging like a cat to the railing of the balcony above, a lean brown figure hung with something in its hand. Now it reached down, dangling a scarlet streamer at the end of a pole before the bull's frenzied eyes. Simultaneously, a light, barbed reed flashed through the air and stuck quivering in its rump.

The bull gave a maddened roar and plunged at the bit of red which the wielder adroitly swung directly before the half-naked, unarmed boy, then flicked away. Down charged the bull, straight for the child. The lad balanced on tiptoe, measuring the swiftly lessening space with practised eye.

The bull was on him; but with lightning swiftness he seized the long, sweeping horns and vaulted nimbly over the creature's back, landing lightly on his feet. Swept on by the momentum of his charge, the bull stumbled blindly on; then, missing its opponent, came to a stop, and turned. Now it saw him, and rushed on again.

Again the youth waited, grasped the great horns and leaped. The crowd burst into tumultuous applause.

Once more the deadly moment came, and again he swung himself over the threatening points, this time with greater effort, and slipped sprawling just over the monster's back, falling flat upon the sand. The bull, familiar with the tactics now, spun around

Digitized by Google

swiftly, saw the prostrate form, and plunged head downward at it.

Just in front of the thundering hoofs the lad gathered himself, sprang aside, and rushed for the door, the bull gaining at every bound. Now the boy turned again, dodged back and slipped through the opening shelter. The baffled bull hurtled against the planking at the side. The spectators thundered and shrieked approval, for the boy had stood the threefold test and fairly won his freedom.

Bellowing with wrath, the tawny brute recovered himself and glared ferociously about. Its adversary was gone, the huge space empty save for itself. Foaming at the mouth, pawing the sand, it strode up and down the arena, roaring its defiance.

Again the great door opened and a second youth came forth. The bull heard the clang of bronze-sheathed wood, whirled around and saw the new victim. It was fairly on him before the boy could dodge.

Caught between the brute and the solid wall, only one course was left—to grasp the lowered horns and leap at once.

He threw himself forward, hands outstretched, but misjudged the distance and fell full on the cruel points, which pierced his breast and thigh. The bull tossed him high in the air, and the torn and bleeding body fell thudding on the sand. A moment's silence; then, as the monster trampled the body of its victim with bloody hoofs, a shout of savage exultation rose from a thousand throats. The blood-lust latent in this splendid but cruel people had been roused; they cheered the brutal scene and clamored for a fresh victim.

Now the red streamer was flaunted in the bull's eyes, blinding and exciting him. He left the mangled carrion and charged the irritating color. Back and forth it lured him, till the courtyard rang with his angry bellow.

As the scarlet rag drew him plunging past the guard-room, the door was thrust open and a girl slipped out. She was clad as the youths had been, in loin-cloth and puttee-like leggings, her graceful, well-shaped limbs rippling with the play of her muscles, the luxuriant hair coiled high on her head.

The bull was following up his tormentor, lunging vainly at the elusive streamer. The girl walked out into the center of the courtyard and coolly bowed to the balconies on all sides in succession. Now the bull-baiter above tolled the beast back along the barricade, and, suddenly snatching the cloth away, vaulted the balcony railing and disappeared in the crowd. The bull looked about in bewilderment, seeking his enemy, and his gaze fell on the girl.

He pawed the sand in frenzy, lashing his sides, rolling his blood-shot eyes, and rocking his head from side to side; then swiftly charged, head down, tail high in air.

With the utmost deliberation the girl awaited his rush; and as he hurtled upon her, the spectators cried down at her, urging her to spring aside. She did not dodge, but flung herself straight at the threatening horns and seized them by the tips, her heels flying up into the air.

She released her grasp, and the fearful force of the charge flung her clear of the bull and a good foot behind him, where she landed safely on her feet. The balconies screamed and roared in frantic excitement.

Now the chase led down the long side of the arena, and the bull drew near and nearer at every plunge. The girl was tiring fast, but her eyes were cool and undaunted.

She turned and darted straight across the sand, but the bull saw and wheeled with unexpected swiftness. Here, in the open, she made her last stand, and as the monster rushed upon her, she dodged and sprang for his head, arms outstretched to catch his horns. But in stepping aside, she had trod in a pool of the dead lad's blood; and as she leapt, her foot slipped and she went down. The bull hurled himself upon her and thrust his horns into her body again and again, treading the life out of her the while with his hoofs. Her head fell back, her eyes rolled in agony; she quivered, and lay dead.

WITHIN the guest-hall, the Northmen chafed at their confinement, uneasy at the sound of thundering feet and tumultuous voices. Valgard strode up and down, plucking at his beard and muttering. The others sat upon the benches, or stood about in surly discontent, ever and again starting and listening intently as the noise without swelled higher. At last Tyrleif sprang to his feet.

"I will endure it no more!" he cried fiercely. "For two days our lord has not been with us, and here we bide, shut in like salmon in a weir, unknowing what they do with him. Mayhap these dogs have slain him, and even now shout in triumph over

Digitized by Google

his corpse! Out, comrades! Force the door! Snatch up whatso ye find! We will avenge our master, or die, taking some of these devils with us!"

Raising a wild shout, the Northmen surged toward the antechamber which separated them from the court. But Valgard, reaching the bolted door before them, thrust out his hand.

"Back, fools!" he cried. "If it is well with the prince ye waste your pains; and if he is slain, what can we do, being few against a land in arms? Do ye stay here, while I, whose place it is, go forth to ask King Minos frankly and openly how our master fares!"

And wrenching the door from its pivots with a mighty tug, he crossed the threshold, only to recoil before the bronze points of a dozen leveled spears. The antechamber was thick with soldiers, and, lining the balcony above, half a score of archers leaned over the stone railing with drawn bows, their shafts pointing down at him. He stood stone-still and before he or his companions could find words, the captain Thalas spoke:

"Ye are caught, fellows. Stir not, or ye shall be filled with bronze. If ye behave well, ye are safe for the present, while your lord tries his lot with the bull. If he fails, bid your gods good night."

Valgard turned on his heel, and faced his companions.

"Be still," he commanded. "While we live, we may be of use; dead men avail little."

RISING from his seat in the southern balcony, King Minos lifted his ebony scepter, and every voice was hushed.

"My people," he said, "it is time to subject the impious Northman to the ordeal. Let the bull be removed, and bring in a fresh one. We shall see how the goddess and her son regard the slaughter of the sacred beast."

The princess, resplendent at his side, touched her father's hand, and, as he sat down, he turned to her and nodded almost imperceptibly. The crowd burst into cheer on cheer. Here would be rare sport. The tall, athletic Northman should make a splendid fight, even against an unwearied bull. Ariadne, however, comforted by the King's promise, smiled in assurance, for she knew the beast that Ragnarr would find awaiting him.

Then something went wrong. Before the attendants, armed with long lariats, could close in about the huge beast still in the arena, the guard-room door opened and Ragnarr came forth.

His Titanic frame and mighty limbs showed to perfect advantage in the scant costume of the bull-ring, and his stern young face was fired with resolution.

Straight toward the bull he strode; when suddenly he saw the slain and mangled girl. He stopped short, his eyes, blank with horror, fixed on her upturned face. It was Rala! One moment he stood staring, then, his face distorted with fury, he ran to meet the charging bull.

They met in full career, and he seized its horns in his great hands. The mighty muscles stood out on his arms; bracing with all the strength of his massive thighs and swelling calves, he held the monster moveless in its tracks. Its ponderous weight against his laboring shoulders, man and beast pitted their furious strength against each other in statuesque rigidity.

Now he put forth a mighty effort; and slowly the great head turned, the glaring eyes rolled upward, and the strong neck bent far to one side. A sharp crack, and all was over. The great bull's tongue lolled out and it fell slowly on its flank.

Ragnarr stood clear, his chest laboring, the sweat running down his face. He stood there motionless, while the crowd stared at him in silent awe.

A voice rang out through the tense stillness. "O king, and men of Crete!" it cried, and all heads turned toward the cry.

In the northern gallery, mounted on the stone railing, stood Ambrogeos, supported by a sailor on either side. His face was pale and terrible, and his outstretched hand pointed down at the victorious Ragnarr.

"O king, and men of Crete! Behold him who stands there; then gaze on me, weak and wounded with his sword! Not ten days have passed since he and his barbarous horde burst into the citadel of Troy, and his murderous blade struck me down in the very presence of King Dardanus! Seize him, slay all his fellows, and cast him howling to the Minotaur!"

A wild cry of rage burst from the throats of the multitude. Men and women hung over the railings, cursing and shrieking in maddened frenzy. Minos, his face livid, his black brows twitching, sprang to his feet

Digitized by Google

and shook his scepter furiously. For many minutes his voice could not be heard.

The king turned, grasped the shoulder of the guardsman behind him till the man winced, and shouted an order into his ear. The fellow fled and disappeared down the stairway.

A minute later, a dozen soldiers burst into the arena. At the sight of their gleaming weapons the crowd grew still, only muttering savagely from time to time.

"Seize him and bind him fast!" King Minos cried. "Harm him not, for he must go unwounded to the sacrifice. Keep his fellows safe, and throw him into the deepest dungeon!"

The soldiers ran forward, spreading out as they approached. Ragnarr, who still stood motionless, in the grip of his red fury, leaped to meet them, death in his eyes. He grasped the nearest in a fearful grip, swung him high in the air and hurled him headlong at the others, knocking two flat to the earth. Then he closed in.

His mighty hands tightened about the neck of the foremost foe. The fellow's knees loosened beneath him, his head fell back, and when the maddened Northman freed him, he was dead.

Three leaped at Ragnarr at once, one on each side and one in front. His fists shot shot out right and left, and the soldiers fell crashing, their skulls smashed like egg-shells.

He flung both arms about the third, crushing him to his breast, till the ribs were broken; then he threw the unconscious Cretan from him.

Those in front hesitated, and he sprang at them, all his being merged in the frenzied desire to kill. They turned and fled, panic-stricken, and he pursued. As he bounded forward, the heavy handle of an ax crashed down from behind upon his head, and black night descended on him.

TO BE CONTINUED

SNUFFY AND THE MONSTER

By GATES GLEN

SNUFFY DOWNS paused a moment before swinging up into his compartment and turned to McGrath, the master mechanic, who stood near by, oil-can and hammer in hand.

"Lord, Mac, ain't she a monster!"

"She's a beauty."

"She's as beautiful as a red, green and blue dragon coming out the sea to eat you. She scares me to death, Mac. I get the shivers every time I touch her."

"Frightened, are you? Well, that's fine talk from the prize crew of the service."

"It's the wicked, leering eye she's got."

"800," latest and finest addition to the Twin City Electric Traction Company's lines, grinned an evil, haughty smile as these remarks were passed upon her. With the leeway of a few scant inches she barely managed to crouch between track and wire-run with her trolley-pole pressed out behind flatly, almost on a level with the wire.

Standing cramped there in the barn amid all the trifling single-trucks and local service double-trucks, she seemed to stoop in a queenly, majestic way and to shrug her shoulders with the air of saying—

Digitized by Google

"I can't live in this place much longer with all this ordinary trash."

With the length and girth of a Pullman car, and finished off inside as finely as one, equipped with twin 150 H. P. motors on each truck, she was commissioned for hourly express service between Concord City and Worcester.

"Mac, she's so high up I feel like I was flying in her. And Lord! She do fly."

"Git up there in it now. '386' is behind you banging her bell to git out."

"Did you fix the brakes?"

"I did that. They're fit and fine's your grandmother's pig. Only a bit stiff in the joints. That'll wear off slow. Keep a 150-pound pressure in her tanks, and feed it to her slow and strong. That'll kick 'em loose if she sticks. She's human, Snuffy. You got to break her in gentle, like a horse, or you'll spoil her."

From the rear Danny O'Brien gave an imperative bell. Snuffy fed the monster two points for a bare second, cut off and commenced to coast slowly out of the barn. Ahead of him, Kate, the bull terrier that belonged to the night watchman, was starting to cross the track carrying a vanquished rat between her teeth.

Snuffy jumped on the gong at his feet. Kate gave his warning signal a contemptuous glance out of one corner of her eye. For the service of rat-killing rendered, she expected in return a right of way at will about the barn. She demanded it and she received it, and Kate's privilege was in the unwritten code of the men.

On "800" rolled, her gong clanging wildly, power off and yet coasting faster and faster each moment of her own weight. McGrath, from a backward angle, perceived the danger and shouted to Snuffy; several others near at hand saw it, too, and lent their shrill voices; but "800" did not stop.

Just as Kate with her prey was jumping to clear the far rail, the wheels of the monster passed over her. There was one short, sickening, ghastly shriek, then the barn was plunged into a breathless, heart-stopped quiet. Upon this, a moment later, a commotion arose, as men, shouting and clamorous, gathered from every part of the huge structure.

Snuffy stopped "800" as he reached the pavement outside. He came back to the spot of the accident, with chalk-like face and hands, body swaying and rocking so unsteadily on his heels, he seemed barely able to stand.

"Look what you done," shouted McGrath, brandishing a mighty red fist about Snuffy's face.

Snuffy stood speechless, looking down at the mangled body.

"Why the devil didn't you stop? What're your brakes for?"

"I—I got rattled, I guess. I couldn't press the lever. My—hand was—paralyzed when I saw the dog crossing."

"You stopped it out on the street!"

Snuffy stared around dazedly at the collected crowd. Amazement spread over his hard, grizzled face.

"O God!" he shrieked.

Tears sprang to his eyes; he covered them with his big red hands and started on a fierce plunge through the crowd. They yielded him a path and stood silent, affected too, as they watched his powerful body, all huddled and shaken with sobs, go slowly down the dimly lighted barn for the office.

"What's the matter?" asked the man behind the screen, as Snuffy entered the room.

"You—you heard—you saw it?"

"Yes, I heard. The dog, wasn't it?" the dispatcher asked in his lifeless voice. "There's '800' out there where you left it. Get it out the way."

"I—I can't," Snuffy sobbed.

The desk man examined the miserable figure before him for a moment.

"All right. Go home and rest up. Report same time tomorrow."

MRS. DOWNS, in a kimono and with disheveled and unkempt hair, still lingered at the kitchen table over her breakfast, reading the paper, when Snuffy entered the flat. His abrupt appearance started a cry of surprise to her lips, but when she noticed his bloodless face, his depressed air and saw him slink to a chair to collapse in it, she was struck silent with fright.

"What happened?" she gasped finally.

Snuffy told her in a listless monotone.

"It ain't so much the dog," he finished, his glazed eyes roving fearfully about the room, "though God knows I'd rather kill a human being than a poor dumb dog. And I can hear his last poor whimper ringing in my ears yet. But it's that great big monster, grinning at me. Break her? Why, she just laughed at me from the first day.

Digitized by Google

She knew she'd break me, instead. I won't never be able to put hand to controller again."

"Heh?" exclaimed Mrs. Downs, petrified, as the bread-and-butter of her life commenced voicing sentiments of dried crusts and oleomargarin.

"I ain't any more good now. My nerve's broke. I can feel it. If I saw a man cross the street five blocks away, I'd jam on the brakes. I know it. I can see '800's' big green face grinning at me now, plainer'n I can see you. It'll never leave me now, night or day."

"Your circuit-breaker's blew out," Mrs. Downs reassured him, "that's all. A cup of coffee'll fix you all right."

She moved ponderously to the stove, gathering her scanty morning garments about her plump figure with a swoop of one hand while she seized the coffee-pot with the other, and swept back to the table.

"There—drink that. It'll fix you; it's been standing two hours."

Snuffy waved it away.

"No use," he muttered.

Mrs. Downs grew indignant at his refusal.

"You'll drink that or I'll know the reason why. An' you'll stop blubberin' like a baby, an' talkin' about seein' things. If they hear that gaff at the barn they'll think you been drinkin'. That'll be the end of you. An' I got my rights, too, ain't I? Don't give me no more talk about pink-pajamied, green-eyed monsters grinnin' at you. You'll earn your pay envelope, serpents or no serpents. I'll be all the gory-eyed monster you'll need."

THE long strong arm of necessity, incarnate in Mrs. Downs, sent Snuffy to the barn next morning, a shrunken, wobegone and harassed figure. He begged not to be put on his old inter-urban trip again, until he had recovered from the effects of the accident, and was given a short city run.

Two hours later he was towed into the barn by the wrecking crew. Snuffy had involved his charge in an argument with a motor coal-truck, and had come out of it with a broken fender and staved-in platform.

"What the devil's happened to you?" asked an inspector, coming out of the office as Snuffy's invalid was brought in. "You'd be fired, only two days ago you were the finest motorman in the service. Now you break everything you put your hands on, like it was your own. What's happened to you?"

"I ain't used to the hand-brakes any more," he muttered dejectedly.

"Then get used to them again. Take that sand-car over there, 5-S, and coast around. She don't go but eight miles an hour, so you can't hurt anything with it. And you got lots of sand by you all the time to stop with."

"What's the card?" Snuffy asked.

"There isn't any with her," the inspector laughed. "You just get aboard and cruise around the city when and wherever you please, only cover the ground. Come back when you get hungry. The only rule is not to get in anybody's way. Baby-carriages've got the right of way over you, too. See?"

The inspector went off, after delivering his parting sneer with gusto. Snuffy walked with bent shoulders to 5-S, and was about to board her when McGrath came up and stopped him with a friendly tug on the arm.

"What's wrong, Snuffy?" he asked. "I didn't mean no harm the way I spoke to you yesterday, only I knew you saw the dog and had lots of time to stop."

Snuffy avoided the direct gaze of the other's eyes uneasily.

"No, I didn't mind that, Mac," he said.

"Well—what then?"

"It's just her—that big '800.' I knew it was coming, Mac, what happened yesterday morning, or something like it. I got palsied waiting for it to come. I felt it in my bones when I put my hand on her. She was there to throw me if she could. And she did. She's too big. They oughtn't to build trolley-cars like her. When you sit up front, rocking and swaying, with her big motors death-killing her along at seventy-five miles an hour, with people crossing your track all the time ahead of you on foot and in wagons, and you knowing you can't stop her inside of two hundred yards —God! Two weeks of that would do to any man what it done to me."

McGrath paused thoughtfully a moment, stroking his face with a large greasy paw. He understood Snuffy's plight. The men of the street-railway service are a superstitious lot. They believe truly, as savages of old believed the trees, woods and waters were inhabited by spirits, that the cars they

Digitized by Google

handle are possessed with genii, either good or bad. The reputation of a car becomes legendary with them, and many a crew would sooner perish by fire than set foot on one which is said to be hoodooed.

"I know, Snuffy," McGrath spoke finally, "but the boys hate to see the finest man in the service knocked flat the way you've been. If you can frame a grievance, maybe the union'll take it up."

"No, no, there ain't anything they can do."

Snuffy shook his head and passed into the car. His mate, already on hand and sitting on the rear platform dangling his legs, was a Scotchman, Lindsay, a man with a long-service record, who had suddenly gone to pieces with drink; in cases such as this the company demoted the man on probation rather than discharge him out of hand.

There was no bell on 5-S. "Shoot!" called Lindsay, and Snuffy started the noisy bobbing little sand-car on its wayfarer's way. At the door he shut off power and let the grunty fellow come to a stop of his own painful stiffness. The night watchman, the owner of Kate that had been killed, was then just leaving the barns.

Snuffy leaned out of the car toward him.

"I wanted to tell you," he spoke hurriedly to the man, "that I'll get you another dog for Kate. I killed her."

The watchman pierced Snuffy with a short, malignant, hateful glance.

"You will, eh? You will not. When I get another dog I'll get her myself. But I won't be getting one while there's a man with an eye like you've got, around the barn murdering 'em off."

The dark threatening countenance expressed a longing to pull Snuffy to the ground and beat him up, but the watchman evidently rallied to the conviction that his eloquence had sufficed and passed away quickly. Snuffy, timid, sensitive, with feelings as gentle as a young doe's, felt the words burn in and the beads of perspiration stand out on his forehead at the lashing. He stood staring after the man with a blank, frightened expression of mute appeal, until Lindsay yelled from the rear:

"Come on. Let's change the scenery."

Despite the ever-present poignancy which the recurrence of these scenes brought him, Snuffy withstood the humiliation and contempt of his new estate better than the lurking, insidious dread that gripped his shaken heart. It was this irrepressible, impalpable apprehension that sapped his spirits. Many times before, in his halcyon days, Snuffy had seen men in the service with their nerve shattered, had seen them pass slowly down and out of sight.

With the recollection of these, his own decay came upon him faster. And when he had officially ushered in the coming of Summer for the city by directing the first sprinkling-car through the streets, the old jaunty red, blue and yellow, and green neckties had disappeared and in their stead had come one of somber black; his blue uniform, carefully pressed and cared-for in other days had become all streaked with dirt and spotted with grime. No more of nights did he toilingly polish the buttons on his coat, nor apply solvent to the braid which proudly marked his years of faithful service. He was like a man grown prematurely old, declining with a speed that was appalling and infinitely pathetic to be seen.

One evening, early in September, as he lay sprawled in his chair, exhausted by the fatigue of the day and the sweltering heat, Danny O'Brien, his former mate, and the good wife came in for a visit.

"Snuffy, me boy," Danny opened, "things have not been going right since you left. '800' has been cutting up turrible capers."

"I'm not surprised," muttered Snuffy.

"We must have you back. You're not the man to be wasted running a sphrinkling-cart."

"Sprinklin'-cart!" Mrs. Downs exclaimed. "Since when has my man been on the water wagon?"

"Since Summer," Snuffy confessed, lowering his glance to avoid her wrath. "They took me off the sand-car to put me on."

"Sand-car!" she echoed incredulously. "My man runnin' a sand-car! Then the sprinklin'-car!"

As the idea slowly spread upon her, she broke into an hysterical laugh, and out of sheer mortification before Mrs. O'Brien covered her face with her apron and fell forward with choking sobs.

Danny O'Brien's wife went to her side and comforted her.

"While women weep," Danny spoke, "'tis for men-folks to be up and fighting. When will you be back with me?"

"Never more," said Snuffy slowly. "Tomorrow's Labor Day, and the sprinkler is

Digitized by Google

cut off. I got my orders to report for the work-car hauling stone for the new track."

"'Tis too bad — too bad," murmured Danny, shaking his head.

"And so, even if I was the man I was once, you see there's no chance for me to get back, for I'm blacklisted; my record's gone."

Snuffy's eyes closed as a film commenced to gather over them.

"Well it is, Danny friend, I remember the old days," he said softly. "The sound of your bell grew to be music in my ears. I have never heard anything like it before or since. I knew every note, every meaning and tone, when you played upon the bell. Was it two bells, soft and slow-like, then I knew an old lady was boarding that hadn't got her foot off the ground while you was pulling the cord, and to start her easy. Was it sharp and quick, I knew he'd leaped on in a hurry. You played a whole scale of notes on that bell, Danny, and I knew every one of them by heart."

"'Twas that made Downs and O'Brien the prize crew of the service. The fastest and safest in the state, we were."

"Until '800' came along," said Snuffy, a look of intense hatred darkening his face. "Then the magic was gone."

"And ever since—from bad to worse. I was telling ye, she's been up to bad tricks. I've had eight farmers at the front end of her since you left."

A farmer, as Danny condemned him, did not reflect upon the man of the soil, but was the language of the trades applied to any one who merited opprobrium for unskilfulness.

"Eight farmers I've had, one after the other, and yet—I don't know whether 't' as been so much their fault as '800.'"

"She's got a demon in her," said Snuffy fiercely.

"I believe it. Her favorite trick now, once a week or so, is to pull the wires down. Her little trolley-wheel spins so fast it spins right off the wire. Then before I can pull it down or get the car stopped, there's two or three hundred feet of wire down, and maybe a pole or two. They've tried tightening the springs on the pole, but there's a limit to that, 'cause when they get it too strong the pole pushes the wire right up, and flop! she slaps over frontward. There's been not a day, since you left, she's gone through every trip on time. And today she plows through a flock of sheep and kills forty. Mike sees 'em a quarter of a mile off, but the headlight blinds 'em and he couldn't stop her. So I get a new farmer tomorrow—Labor Day, the worst day in the year."

"There's a demon in her," said Snuffy solemnly, rising agitatedly.

"I can well believe it."

"If she was human," Snuffy cried, advancing toward the other, "I'd kill her. But she ain't even steel, wood and glass. She's a monster with a soul as black as night. If she'd turn human for just one minute I'd kill her, Danny—I'd kill her! And you'd see the black blood gush out of her."

LABOR DAY is inevitably one of the busiest of the year on the Twin City Lines. Excursionists for the day, moving between Concord City and Worcester, call upon the company to press every car in the barns into service. They are sent out on that line in pairs, taking alternate turns at stops, separated at intervals of five minutes.

As the minutes of the day slipped by with no serious accident reported, the men in the offices and at the barns breathed with slowly increasing relief, for there is always an atmosphere in such places on these days premonitory of disaster. They expect it. They are surprised and thank God most reverently if nothing goes wrong. As the day thus grew without event they relaxed, for the chances of trouble were lessening, and would soon pass.

The traffic was especially heavy, as there was a Knights Templars' convention and parade in Concord City, toward which all creation, it seemed—men, women and children in endless numbers—gathering at Worcester on trains and trolley lines and the steamboats from down the river, were moving like a gigantic flood. In the herculean task of transferring this mighty mass of humanity to Concord City from Worcester during the morning, "800" was doing the giant's share, gorging the work of any other three cars with her frequent and speedy trips and generous carrying capacity. It was for such emergencies as this that she had been purchased.

Perhaps because of this or simply to spite her owners out of the downright devilish strain that was in her, it was that she was the first and only one to break down under

Digitized by Google

the unusual load. She played her favorite trick: four hundred feet of wire and two poles lay prostrate on the ground six miles out of Concord City.

Helpless in the net she had brought down about her, "800," west-bound, was trapped like a snarling exultant beast; behind her was dammed up an angry, impatient stream of excursionists bound for the convention. The wire crew went to work on the east-bound track and in half an hour released the stemmed-up traffic in halting fashion, compelled to travel both ways by turns over a two-mile section of single track. Then they commenced the task of mending the west-bound wire and extricating "800," after first transferring her passengers to a relief car.

The precarious exigencies of holiday travel and the circus-ring behavior of "800" caused Snuffy not the slightest anxiety today. At daybreak he had reported at the barn, donned overalls over his blue trousers for the first time in his career, and taken his place in the little cab of the flat work-car with its chain of noisy, jangling bumpers stretching out behind.

In the dull, enervated and childlike apathy that had become his settled habit, he performed the monotonous circuit of this newly allotted task, the lowest point in the service. He began by backing his cars under the stone-cutter at the quarry, hauled the load to where the track was being extended to a suburban ward, waited while the crew unloaded, and then crept back to the quarry again.

His route lay partly over the main line of travel as far as the city line at a junction where the tracks for Worcester took to the side of the highway straight ahead and the spur line which Snuffy traveled cut across at right angles.

As he reached this point about noon, on his tenth trip, he was compelled to halt before crossing to the left, upon finding the west-bound track blocked by a string of eight cars released in a horde from the single-track blockade which had to be traveled to avoid the stalled "800." A car in their lead with a burnt-out fuse was causing the tie-up.

Snuffy leaned out of his cab window during the interval, and overheard a group of conductors discussing the latest escapade of the wanton vixen, "800." The accident had occurred over an hour and a half ago and wire crew were still sweating and cursing the wire back in place for temporary use.

"She's a one-eyed, gaping, grinning she-devil of a monster," muttered Snuffy to himself, "and she's got a demon in her they'd blackball out of hell. They'll be lucky if she don't kill a thousand people before they kill her."

A distant rumble became audible to his ears.

"That's her now. I'd know the sound of her five miles away. I could feel her coming even if I couldn't hear her. And she's bound this way hell-bent for election to make up time."

The sound grew louder and more distinct. The others standing about soon became apprised of "800's" rapid approach, and turned to gaze up the tracks. For the first three-quarters of a mile from the city the grade lay up a gradual, steady sloping hill, at the crest of which was a "Dead Stop" for all cars coming into the city.

With a low, sullen roar, the front of "800" appeared suddenly over the rise. Without the necessary pause she commenced to shoot straight down it.

A sudden, simultaneous cry leaped from the lips of those standing on the street as they saw it. In that second it did not require an impossible mathematical process to determine how long it would take a car capable of seventy-five miles an hour to plunge down the hill and into the line of overcrowded cars stalled in her path.

She was not making her best now, swaying and rocking from side to side like a drunken man who lacks the requisite propelling power to keep a straight course, but even thus handicapped she held the passengers in the cars ahead trapped like helpless mice. Madly merciless she had bided her time and chosen her opportunity with demoniacal craftiness for the bloodthirsty rampage she craved.

Men that saw the danger ran instantly along the sides of the imperiled cars shouting the warning. Panic broke loose. Pitiful, horrified, beseeching cries rang out. There was scant time for even a quarter of those in the first car to escape. Those near the platform rushed and fairly flung themselves out; there was the crash of broken falling glass as men and women battered the windows near them to pieces, crawled and plunged to safety and passed terrified

Digitized by Google

children to waiting hands below that grasped them.

SNUFFY, in his cab, saw "800" come over the hill. Like a man who waits helpless, after abandoning useless flight, encharmed almost, while his relentless enemy approaches, he saw "800" come raging at her helpless victims. He was on the east-bound track and safe from her attack.

He saw her fail to make the customary stop. Instantly he knew that her brakes had failed, and realized the danger. Ahead of him, just beyond his own switch, lay the one which local cars used in crossing to the west-bound track, on which "800" was coming, for the return trip back to the city. It was open.

Slowly, but with all the old cunning he knew of "putting her against the peg," without throwing out the circuit-breaker, Snuffy fed the power to the lowly motors of the work-car. The heavily loaded train fairly jumped forward into the fray, under the hand of a master who understood her.

Sticking to his cab until he had passed the switch and set his brakes he had just time enough to jump and run to cover before the crash ensued. It came like the deafening, earth-shaking explosion of a gigantic gun. There followed the piercing sound of splintered wood, the dull groan of twisted snapping steel and the torrential crackling of shattered glass.

"800," backed by her tremendous momentum and extraordinary weight, plowed snortingly through the wooden frame of the first flat-car, contemptuous, scornful of such an opponent and hungry for a taste of the human blood on beyond. She tore as ruthlessly at her next foe, but the weight of the loaded stone told by now, and halfway through she came to a baffled, snarling stop. The impact of it was so great that she turned turtle and rolled with an earsplitting thud into the ditch at one side, crumbling in her roof and beautiful Pullman sides like dry tinder.

Snuffy leaped from cover and sprang toward "800," as she lay groaning in her death agony.

"There, you son-of-a-gun, you gory-eyed, green-painted monster!" he shrieked, brandishing his doubled fist at the prostrate car. "Now you lie dead. You mighty near killed me, and I ain't sorry at all I killed you first."

The inspector had gained Snuffy's side by that time.

"That was some pretty quick thinking, Snuffy," he said.

"Quick thinking ——! I didn't think at all to go after that. I just did it—that was all."

"Whatever it was, they'll be wanting to see you soon at the offices. You've saved them a pretty big bill today."

"I don't care nothing about that," Snuffy answered. "My reward's just looking at her. But if you need a man to make up a crew to take a car in that dead one's place, I'll take my old job back again. My old mate, Danny O'Brien, is out there somewhere with a broken leg, where he jumped, and it's up to me to see what I can do for him."

"All right. Quick! Get them overalls off. Don't you bother about cleaning up this mess. You ain't a Dago any more."

Digitized by Google

The UNMUDDING OF THE EMPIRE

by DOUGLAS S. WATSON

STEPHEN KENDALL and the train-boy alone remained of the crowd that had wedged itself into the smoking-car early in the morning when the train left Bakersfield for the Westside Oilfields, and the boy was whistling shrilly and incessantly as he bundled darkening bananas, wrinkling apples and mummying cigars into his brass-studded chest.

As he listened unwillingly to the piercing notes Kendall became conscious that the ragtime arranged itself into an accompaniment of the rhythmic, recurring words that surged through his tired brain. They seemed to creep out from behind the gaunt weathered derricks, towering above the desert and sage-brush, to hurl their monotonous syllables through the heat-swirling air at the open window where he sat.

The bare shale hills that danced in the vibrant sunshine took up the refrain. It lurked in the deep purple shadows that swathed the shady sides of the double-roofed shacks that waited like so many eager birds of prey, each atop its isolated knoll, for the approach of the quarry, the first suggestion of evening coolness that might stumble up the wide, sun-scorched valley.

The roaring in the labyrinth of a sea-shell suggests the sea; and so the words that had not ceased to din their hideous message into Kendall's consciousness during the last twenty-four hours were but the reminder of the ocean of trouble in which he struggled, and over which he strained his tired eyes for a gleam of hope.

A maze of worried puckers gathered about his blue eyes as he shaded them with a steel-strong hand to gaze ahead at the box-car station, marking the end of the line, and he wondered if George Williams had received his telegram and if he would be waiting there for him in the buckboard amid the black hillocks of oil-well casing that surrounded the rail-head like the mounds of a prairie dogs' city.

"I'm going crazy—plumb crazy!" he muttered as the haunting words forced themselves forward as an answer to his thought-query, and, pulling himself together, he staggered along the empty aisle between the vacant red-plush seats that flung at him a dry, dusty smell, a reminder of the dirty foot-gear that had lolled there in defiance of the black-faced signs at either end of the car.

He jerked a nod at the train-boy as he lurched through the open door to the platform where, hat and suit-case in hand, he waited impatiently for the Westside local to wheeze along the last thousand feet of track.

"Whew! It's hot," he mumbled wearily, and from the nested, sizzling, dull-black piles of pipe reverberated the ghostly words that followed him as his shadow.

Before the screeching brake-shoes ceased chattering at him he stumbled to the

Digitized by Google

ground, and swung back over the red-hot ties through the noonday glare, wondering if Williams's greeting would remind him of the hated whisperings, but, instead, the cheerful voice of the superintendent of the Bronze Duck Oil Company called out:

"Hello, boss! Here, give me your bag. How's everything in the big burg—in 'Frisco?" and, for the instant, the friendly words blotted out the nightmare motif, forced it back into temporary oblivion.

The big bays lunged across the tracks, and his companion continued—

"I didn't want to tell you back there." He jerked his left thumb over his shoulder. "You understand, too many rubbernecks. But, Steve, the Number One's 'most in. And gassy! Say, she threw the drilling water over the casing three times this morning. She'll be a humdinger of a well, all right. Say, did you think to bring the pay-roll, Steve?"

Williams turned his bronzed face quite naturally as he asked the casual question.

"Eh? What 'say?" Kendall pretended not to understand, and absently rubbed the day's growth of beard on his protruding chin. "Pay-roll?" he repeated with feigned surprise. "Yes, yes. Quite right. I'll talk to you about it after dinner."

He breathed easier for here was an hour's reprieve. An hour! But, as the team rounded the water-tank, behind the camp buildings, the stream, dripping from the two-inch inlet into its vast, vacant interior demanded in dull, galvanizing tones—

"Where am I going to get it?"

II

BEFORE them lay the Bronze Duck camp, a yellow-and-green painted oasis of rough board buildings scattered on three sides of a sun-pelted sandy plaza, while the fourth, or easterly boundary, was marked by the derrick over the Number One well, above and beyond which could be seen the rig of the Empire's well a quarter of a mile across the sage-brush flat.

"We're not drilling!" Kendall pointed to the idle beam of the Bronze Duck derrick raised toward the sky like a huge telescope.

"Something's wrong!" Williams shouted, and as they neared the buildings a sudden hiss and roar of escaping steam beat about their ears with incessant din.

The buckboard shot into the square, and a knot of excited, pale-visaged men surged forward and swarmed about them. All shouted at once, but the steam-tossed air-waves dashed all semblance of intelligence from the high-pitched words. Williams bent his white face forward, his hand to his ear, the fingers of his right hand trembling about the reins.

Kendall calmly followed the pointings of gesticulating arms toward the derrick. From the torrent of confused sounds leaped the words, "pipe-collar—ten feet."

He repeated them.

"Yes, yes! That's it!" came the breathless chorus, and, without waiting for confirmation of his surmise, he leaped to the ground and dashed toward the well.

With a jerk he drew up at the derrick door. His eyes, still partly blinded by the desert glare, sought first in the dim interior the pendant tangle of wire lines from which hung the enormous casing-block and hook that moves the pipe, raising and lowering it; then the calf-wheel drum and brake; then the flooring about the well.

"Who's on tower?" he snapped at the crowd, his accusing glance resting upon their faces as he swung about in a quick half circle.

"Bill Gunn!" was the damning answer.

And Hank Dodge pointed to the thick-chested, heavy-muscled dark man cowering against the lazy bench in the corner quite hidden in the shadows.

"I'm his tool-dresser," Dodge explained in a nervous, cracking voice. "He was moving pipe; not five minutes ago. Thought it was getting logey; thought it might get stuck. He sent me to the tool-house for some waste. It happened when I was out."

"So!" The ejaculation, and comprehending nod, showed Kendall's immediate grasp of the situation. "So the collar, the coupling, jumped off of its own accord, I suppose, and let the whole 3100 feet of pipe drop ten feet down the hole! Like fun it did!" he sneered. "Look at that floor!" His condemning finger stabbed at the crushed planking. "I'll tell you what happened. The elevator, holding the casing to the calf-line, hit the spider so hard when it came down it tore the collar off. Look at the calf-wheel brake—it hasn't been used. The cable just ran free. If it wasn't that, the spider'd be there on the floor." And

Digitized by Google

he waved toward the heavy metal ring deeply buried in the splintered boarding, whose toothed dogs grip the casing during drilling operations.

"Say, Steve Kendall, do you accuse me—of monkeying—of dropping that pipe on purpose? Do you?"

Gunn slouched forward, his black eyes narrowing, his whole attitude full of menace.

"Accuse you, Gunn? Say, listen! You're either a fool or a crook. That's plain talk. Fool or crook! When you've ruined a man's well that's cost nearly sixty thousand dollars he's entitled to talk plainly. Fool or crook! You hear? You can take your choice. Now git! Pronto! Use some speed!" Kendall's shaking finger aimed at the door.

"I'm fired, eh?" Gunn snarled, and spat contemptuously.

"You're right, you're fired," Kendall thundered with a meaning sidewise plunge of his head.

Neither man moved. The eyes of the crew wove rapidly from one to the other, some wondering, some hoping, some fearing that the threatened combat would end only in words.

"Fired because a collar jumps off of that rotten pipe. That's a great——"

"Cut it! Cut it! You're fired. That's all there's to it. I don't have to tell you why. A driller never moves pipe without his toolie at the calf-wheel brake in case of accident. You a driller!" Kendall laughed bitterly. "You're a kitchen mechanic, that's what you are! Now, pull your freight, and be P. D. Q. about it."

A sunbeam wedge pried its way through a chink in the derrick roofing and shone upon Kendall's face: the jaw muscles swelled with determination: the cheeks were flushed: the eyes blazed with angry scorn.

"Oh, I'll go. You needn't worry, Mr. Kendall. There're plenty more jobs, jobs where I won't have to wait for my money, either. I'll get my things from the bunkhouse, if it's all the same to you."

He flung back with a sneering laugh as he strutted through the door and disappeared behind the engine-house.

"That's done," snorted Kendall. "Now, Dodge," he turned to the tool-dresser, "lower the fires under the boilers. The rest of you come to dinner. We'll eat first, then we'll figure how we'll pull ourselves out by the boot-straps. Come on," he repeated sharply and led the way to the cook-house.

III

"WELL?" began Williams comprehensively, when, after dinner, Kendall entered the superintendent's office and dropped into a home-made armchair near the window.

Kendall made no reply but thought in silence. A grim doggedness possessed his face, giving it a hard, intense look; his indrawn lips thinned to an uncompromising straight line; the gray lurking beneath his shock of slightly reddish hair revealed itself, while his heavy brows became heavier with a frown.

"Well?" insisted Williams after a space.

"George, I've got it figured out!" Kendall sprang to his feet and paced the small room. "On the train just one thing worried me—pay-roll. Where am I going to get it? I asked myself until I thought I'd go crazy. Now they're two things—Bill Gunn and the Empire crowd. We'll talk pay-roll first."

"Pay-roll?" questioned Williams explosively.

"Just that. That's the question before the house. How? Where?" And with a half-laugh, half-grunt of amused despair, Kendall thrust his hands deeply into his trouser pockets, instantly withdrawing them, and with them the lining. "There you are, George! I'm busted flatter'n a pancake!"

"But I thought your friend, Mac—Macdonald in the bank——"

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, we both thought wrong. We're awful smart, we are!"

"But you saw him? You talked with him? You showed him my telegram about the well, the one I sent you yesterday morning?" Williams, looking up, laid an anxious and appealing hand upon his friend's sleeve.

"Yes, I told about our well. I showed him your wire. I told him. 'Mac,' I said, 'I want you to know just how I stand because I need some money.' Oh, he listened patiently enough, I'll say that. I told him about locating the entire section on the first of last January, and about my deal with the Empire Consolidated—how they were to drill, and were drilling, upon the northeast quarter—how they were to pay me

Digitized by Google

fifteen hundred dollars an acre, $240,000 in all, when they got a two-hundred-barrel well—how I'd arranged with them, the Empire crowd, for casing and supplies, and to give them notes instead of cash. I explained how with the cash I had, and the supplies from the Empire, I'd begun drilling the Bronze Duck well on the northwest quarter.

" 'How much do you owe the Empire, now?' Mac asked.

" 'Forty-six thousand,' I told him, and he whistled.

" 'Mac,' I said, 'I've come to you for help. My first notes to the Empire come due thirty-five days from tomorrow, and I've got an idea they're trying to put one over on me.'

" 'What do you mean?' he demanded.

" 'I've got it figured out,' I said, 'that they know what's in their well; that they're holding it back—won't let it flow, got it plastered up, the oil sand mudded off tight as a drum, waiting for me to fall down on my notes, and then jump in and grab the whole works, the Bronze Duck and all. They'd have me on my back. They could force me to take whatever they offered.'

"Then I told him I needed four or five thousand to complete our well; that we were only forty or fifty feet off the big sand.

" 'Have you any security to offer, Steve?' he asked.

"I laughed in his face, turned on my heel and left. And, there you are! No security, no pay-roll. No pay-roll, no well. No well, no security. Circles! George, it's to laugh. Take it from me—them that have, get; them that haven't, git! And a few measly hundreds would have greased the wheels. Instead," he shrugged, "here I am with nix, nary a cent."

"I'll let you have what you need, Steve."

Kendall turned his head slowly, his eyes lagging, his brows in a frown, his lips tensed, and then, as he faced the man before him, shot him a swift searching glance, and quickly bowed his head.

"How much do you need, old man," persisted Williams, his whole endeavor being to comfort and encourage, and his calloused hand sought his friend's.

"Don't, don't, George! No, no. Wait——"

Kendall broke off, eluded Williams's grasp, and, turning his back, paced the room again to hide his feelings and to regain his self-possession.

For a full five minutes one sat in silence; the other tramped the squeaking boards.

"Bill Gunn was paid by the Empire to drop that pipe," was the startling announcement that Kendall hurled into the quiet.

"You mean it wasn't an accident!" exclaimed the superintendent incredulously, starting from his chair.

"Accident no! Ever see him with any of the Empire crowd?"

"He was talking to Ollie Carroll and Jim Cliff yesterday afternoon in front of Barnes's store. I went up and asked Ollie how deep their well was."

"I thought so!" Kendall nodded conclusively. "What did Ollie Carroll say, George?"

"Said they were down 3300 feet."

"3300 feet! Something wrong there! That's a hundred feet too deep; that's below the oil. Where's that cross-section that Elmer made. That shows the depth of the oil sands."

Williams fumbled in his desk, then passed a blueprint to Kendall.

"See! What did I tell you!"

The owner of the Bronze Duck ran an exultant finger along a line representing the probable dip and extent of the oil-sands underlying Section 20.

Williams gave a profound assentive and convinced nod. "You're right, Steve," he concluded.

"I can see it all now, George. This is nothing but a gigantic game of freeze-out. The Empire gang knew I'd need money. 'All right,' they said, 'we'll fix that. Oh, that's dead easy. All we need to do is to drop a hint in the right place that Kendall's well isn't showing up the way it should.' Money's made round, my boy, so it'll roll away at the first breath of suspicion. Then, on top of this money business, they hocussed their well, and hired Gunn to ruin mine. That's the sum total of it, George."

"What can you do? You've got no evidence to——"

"Evidence? Evidence! With that gang we'll work on suspicion. Now, if you'll let me have it, I'll borrow all the money you've got. I'm going to tackle the Empire well tonight."

"The Empire well! Tonight!" Williams gasped.

"George, do I have to tell you that a rotary drilling outfit plasters the sides of the hole it makes with mud; that with standard

Digitized by Google

tools we have to put in good steel casing as we go along? That Empire well was drilled with a rotary. They've mudded off the oil-sand so she can't flow—purposely, waiting for me to go broke. I'll fool them. I'll unmud their hole if I have to——"

The superintendent nodded ruminatively as Kendall checked himself, and a smile flickered upon his lips. His eyes danced, and then, throwing back his head hysterically, peal after peal of laughter shook him. He staggered about the room, waving his arms flail-like above his head.

"Wow!" he howled, and Williams looked at him as at one suddenly bereft of reason.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded sternly.

"Oh, George," Kendall sputtered as he tried to control himself, "we'll just unmud that Empire hole so easy! And she'll flow," he went on in gasps. "She'll flow, and I'll have the balance of the purchase price to pay off my notes, and everything'll be hunky-dory. Won't Carroll and Cliff be fighting mad! Won't they like it when they find we're on to their funny business! When we——"

Kendall tiptoed to Williams's side and, with a great show of secrecy, first looking about for possible eavesdroppers, whispered in his ear.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!" shouted the superintendent. "No? you don't mean to do that?" he queried hoarsely.

"Surest thing you know, George Williams," Kendall assured him stoutly. "Now get busy. Take one of the boys with you to drive back the team you're going to hire for the night. Run along now, old man. And don't forget all the things you're to get."

Williams assented dumbly and edged toward the door. He seemed too stunned by the whispered words to speak.

"I'll take all the blame," Kendall called after him as he made his way to the barn. "Don't forget, George, our twenty years' experience goes into this little trick."

IV

KENDALL watched Williams cross the open space between the office and the derrick, saw him hail Kerr, and then went to his room to change to clothes suitable to the hard, grimy work ahead.

He was standing on the office steps, dressed in dingy khaki, when the superintendent and the head driller drove past on their way to the straggling collection of temporary buildings beyond the railway known as "the town."

"Good luck!" he called after them and, as they waved back, sauntered out into the sunshine, past his own derrick and over the quarter-mile of sage-brush flat to the Empire's well.

Kendall gave Maclean, boss of the clean-out gang, a cheery greeting as he entered the derrick.

Maclean, at the bull-wheels, the huge drum on which the drilling line is reeled, brake in hand, jerked out a curt "Hello!" and continued to run the tools into the hole.

With a glance about the rig, and a pleasant nod to the other workmen, the visitor moved to the lazy bench and sat down.

"When did you change from rotary to standard tools, Maclean?" he asked with casual interest.

"Couple of weeks ago."

The noise of the wire rope running into the hole nearly drowned the mumbled answer, but the lack of the usual cordiality that exists between men of the same craft was apparent in the gruff tone. Maclean left the bull-wheels and helped set the drilling clamps on the wire line. Then, seated on the derrick stool, he started the engine.

With a smile Kendall watched the jerky motion of the beam that told him the tools, three-fifths of a mile below the derrick floor, were not on bottom and doing no work. The smile broadened as Maclean "fanned" the screw—worked the device for lowering the cable—with feverish rapidity, letting the heavy tools carry its six feet to the end without stopping, and then give the order to pull out.

"How much casing in the hole, Mac?"

The glistening tools clanged dripping from the well.

"Thirty-two hundred and fifty feet of six-inch," came the abrupt and grudging answer.

The visitor's heart jumped. Here was the news he wanted, and he gripped himself to suppress the boyish desire to throw his hat in the air and shout. So they hadn't been satisfied with mudding off the oil-sand, but had run six-inch steel casing into the hole, and now at least fifty feet of pipe extended below the depth of 3200 feet where

Digitized by Google

Elmer's cross-section proved to be the point of production.

The tool-dresser emptied the bailer that had just come to the surface. Iridescent colors spread over the dump-box as the drilling water ran free to the gully without.

"Looks like oil, Mac," ventured Kendall.

"Oil—no!" grunted Maclean. "Say, I'll drink all the oil ever comes out of this here dry hole."

"Maybe, but I doubt it," Kendall laughed. "When you bail again, old man, let me have a sample. You don't mind, do you?"

"You get no sample from this well, Steve Kendall, without orders from Ollie Carroll, you understand?" Maclean shouted angrily.

Kendall grinned and shrugged.

"Oh, very well," he drawled aggravatingly. "Don't get mad, I'm not going to steal anything. Now, do a good, slap-bang job, Mac," he advised as he backed, laughing, to the door. "Honest, old man, I hope you don't have to drink all the oil this well'll make. I know you're some drink — No, I shouldn't say that; but you have an expansive thirst, eh?" And amid an undertone of poorly concealed snickers Kendall left the rig.

He walked back to the Bronze Duck office and sat on the step, looking back at the Empire well and turning over in his mind the plans he had imparted to Williams. Shortly, he saw the Empire's red automobile drive off with the crew, leaving the well in charge of Gortz, the night watchman, who lived in a shack fifty yards from the derrick.

"They're doing just enough work to comply with the terms of their contract with me," Kendall muttered as the red car turned into the county road and sped southward in the direction of the Empire Consolidated's home camp, five miles away.

V

THE return of Williams, followed by Kerr in a livery team that bore a remarkable resemblance to the type used by the Empire Consolidated Oil Company, brought Kendall to his feet.

"Put your team in the barn and tell the boys I want them all to come here, Fatty," the superintendent told Kerr as he sprang to the ground.

"Get everything?" demanded Kendall, coming forward.

"Sure. Come, lend a hand, Steve? Help lug this stuff into the office," Williams requested, and began to gather the three long galvanized iron canisters that lay on the wagon bed.

"What's under the blanket, George?" Kendall's eyes twinkled.

"Shuh! The big medicine," explained the superintendent in a low secretive voice. "Don't get careless with it, Steve," he laughed, "or we won't need your services much longer."

Kendall deposited his burden on the office floor. "Did you tell Fatty Kerr what we're going to do?" he asked.

"Nope!" The superintendent shook his head decidedly. "Thought I'd tell the boys all at once. Here they come now." Then, turning to the approaching men, he called: "Come on in, fellows," and held back the screen door for them to enter.

"Boys," began Williams, his face sobering, his voice strained and grating, when all were seated and the door closed and locked, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to ask you to do something. And I want your word of honor you'll never tell a soul what's said in this room today. If you can't see your way clear to help, I want you to lie low and not hinder those who feel like helping. Have I your promise?"

Kerr; Hank Dodge and Ted Smith, the toolies; Porter, the roustabout, all pledged a mute fealty as their startled eyes, freighted with questions, met Williams's.

"You understand the game?" he asked when he had told them the details of Kendall's situation and his plans.

The four heads nodded solemnly.

"Anybody want to be excused?"

Silence answered the question while his auditors regarded each other with amused, expectant grins.

Kendall sprang to his feet. "Fellows," he stammered impulsively, "you're all true blue. Your hearts are in the right place. If tonight's business comes out as we hope I may be able to repay you. If we're successful none of you need worry about the future."

His hands trembled as he clasped the eager hands held out to him.

"Fatty, where's your boy?" growled Williams to Kerr. For a man to display emotion was to him incomprehensible.

Digitized by Google

"Jimmy? Oh, he's home, George. Want him?"

"We need him to drive team tonight," the superintendent explained, and, as Kerr left on his errand, he apportioned the work to be done. "Steve, you and Porter open the boxes and fill the canisters. Cut the sticks up fine," he cautioned, "and tamp the stuff well with a piece of wood. I'll take Dodge and Smith with me to the derrick and get busy. Fatty will join us there. After supper the toolies," Dodge and Smith grinned, "will have a part to play that'll keep 'em busy most all evening," and with a wink he led the younger men from the room.

A new sand-line was gotten from the storehouse and spliced to the one in the derrick. The distance from the Bronze Duck well to the Empire well was measured and found to be 1316 feet. To this was added 3204 feet, the estimated depth to the oil-sand. At this point in the line, 4520 feet from the end, a piece of white cloth was inserted; the mate to which was fastened 1316 feet inside the first. These preparations complete, the small wire rope was rewound upon the sand-reel.

Kendall and Porter finished their task just as the supper-gong rang from the cookhouse, and there they joined the others.

The group that gathered about the oil-cloth-covered board, Kendall likened to a death-watch; certainly the excited talk, followed by long periods of silence; the manner in which all toyed with rather than ate their food; the whole air of expectancy, and the electrical, nervous atmosphere gave some similarity to the confused emotions that encircle a condemned prisoner.

Before the meal was over Kendall slipped from the room to wander in the twilight and try to get a grip upon himself.

The bare shale hills in the west were silhouetted darkly against the fast-fading golden light of the late Spring day. Above the eastern horizon, where the Buena Vista hills roll in great ground swells from the desert plain, the first bright stars shone, and the deep purple, that was stretching its paling finger-tips toward the sunset, was beginning to wrap the treeless waste within its velvet mantle.

From the derrick-filled valley rose numberless columns of ashen smoke, which, mingling, distorted all objects into fantastic shapes in the weird half-light. Later there would be a moon, but now, as the day faded, an almost inky blackness settled down which the twinkling stars seemed only to accentuate.

Kendall's aimless wanderings brought him at last across the flat toward the Empire well. Standing near the corner of his own property, he could see Gortz, the watchman, through the open door of his rude cabin, eating his lonely supper. He turned back to tell Williams, and found him giving Dodge his last instructions.

"Hank," the superintendent was saying "Jimmy Kerr's going to drive over to Gortz's and give him a note. It's supposed to be from Ollie Carroll of the Empire asking Gortz to come at once to the home camp. That'll get him out of the way sure as shooting."

"What's that?" broke in Kendall.

Williams explained his plan again in detail.

"Say, that'll never do," said Kendall pensively. "Why, man, that would be forgery, and I'll be gosh darned if I'll stoop to that even to save the Bronze Duck. There must be some other way out. Let me think."

"We might just bluff it out," suggested Williams tentatively. "Jimmy might tell Gortz he's wanted, and get away with it."

Kendall shook his head.

"No. That won't do. Tell me, Hank, how well do you know this Gortz? Has he any weaknesses? Does he drink? Does he gamble?"

"Does he gamble?" echoed the tool-dresser eagerly. "Does he gamble! Well, I should say he does. He thinks he's the best poker-player on the West Side. Why, he'd rather play cards than eat, any old time. The boys of the West Side Petroleum spend most of their evenings down at his shack shuffling the pasteboards."

Kendall struck the palm of his left hand a resounding blow with his clenched fist.

"That's it, by gravy!" he announced enthusiastically.

"What's the idea, Steve?" his listeners demanded in one breath.

"Oh, it's too good to be true! It's too easy! Hank, you go over to the office and write a note in pencil. Something like this:

" 'DEAR ED:

" 'Four of us are down at the Aloha Crude, sitting in a little game of ten-cent ante, limit a dollar. There's a tenderfoot here from Los who thinks he's some *punkins*. I want you to come over and clean

Digitized by Google

him. I'll stake you if you like, so you needn't come heeled, and Jimmy'll bring you in the rig. I'll see that you get back. Now come a-running.

HANK DODGE.'

"How does that strike you?" Kendall asked with an expansive grin.

"Oh, great! Great!" gurgled Dodge gleefully.

"Immense!" roared Williams.

"Another thing," Kendall went on, still grinning, "he'll never peach. He'll have to keep his mouth shut. He won't dare tell that he ran off from his job to play cards. If he opens his head, he'll give himself away and get fired."

"But suppose he won't come?" asked Williams anxiously.

"Won't come, eh? Say, George, you don't know Gortz. He's a demon for cards, that's what he is," retorted Dodge positively.

"But to answer your supposition, George." Kendall, who had thrust his arm through the tool-dresser's to lead him to the office, turned to Williams. "I would say that if our plan fails we'll have to use force instead of strategy. We might kidnap him, eh?" He started to move off. "We'll be back shortly, and while we're gone you'd better get Jimmy and the team ready." And with a nod he fell into step with Dodge, leaving Williams scratching his head expressively.

A half-hour later, Kendall returned alone with a bit of paper in his hand. Williams was chatting with Jimmy Kerr who sat in the hired buckboard, ready to depart on his errand.

"Now, Jimmy, repeat to me what you're to do. I want Mr. Kendall to hear."

"I'm to drive over to Gortz's and give him a note, and then take him by the lower road toward the Aloha Crude camp. When we get to the bottom of the big, dry wash on Section 33, I'm to stop when I'm ordered to, and then I'm to leave him with the other fellows and drive back here when they let me go."

"You're all right, Jimmy," said Williams encouragingly. "You've got a head-piece like a man. Nobody'd ever take you for a kid of fifteen. Now, don't get nervous. Don't talk too much to your passenger, and hurry back."

"Here's your note," Kendall broke in, thrusting the paper into the boy's coat pocket. "Drive along now; and good luck to you!" He shook the youngster's hand and the team moved off.

Kendall and Williams edged their way toward the Empire well. Hidden by a clump of sagebrush, they watched. They saw Jimmy pull up before the watchman's shanty and call him out. They saw him give Gortz the note, and then followed an anxious wait, during which the well's guardian hesitated, shook his head, walked back from the team, returned to Jimmy's side, wavering and uncertain. They saw the boy make an impatient gesture, and his voice became audible in the quiet.

"Aw, you're a cheap sport, Gortz," he said, picking up the reins.

"I'm afraid I'll lose my job if I'm found out."

"Who'll ever know? Leave your lamp burning. That'll fool the boss if he happens along the county road," Jimmy suggested cunningly. A minute later the team drove off with two occupants in the direction of the lower road.

VI

"HALT!"

"Hands up!"

Two bandanna-masked men sprang from the roadside sagebrush and seized the horses' bridles.

"Wh-wh-w-h-a-t d'yer w-a-n-t?" stammered the terrified Gortz.

"Get out of that rig, and be —— quick about it!" commanded the taller of the highwaymen roughly.

Gortz, a-tremble, hastened to obey, and stumbled to the ground.

"Pardner, you take the kid and the team. Tie the horses, and bring the youngster back so we can search him, too. I'll keep our friend here company till you return."

The shorter man sprang to the seat at Jimmy's side, and the horses were driven down the wash to a point where the bed of the dry stream changed direction. Here they were tied, completely hidden from the road by the sheer side of the gully and the overhanging brush.

The horses disposed of, Jimmy was marched back to the road, and along it to the lonely spot where the other masked man stood guard over the prostrate watchman.

"Blindfold him, and tie his hands behind him," ordered the leader. "Do as I've done with this Indian." He touched Gortz

Digitized by Google

with his boot. "Then we'll take our prisoners into the brush and search them. Say, this ought to be some haul, eh?"

Jimmy was tied, and the procession moved off with Gortz in the lead. At a distance from the road the watchman was made to lie down again and the smaller of the men went through his pockets.

"What d'yer get?" whispered the commander hoarsely.

"Nothing!" came the disgusted reply. "Sack of tobacco; a dollar watch; cigarette papers!"

"Stung again!" the tall man hissed contemptuously.

"What'll I do with the junk?" demanded his companion.

"Give it back to him. It's no use to us. We want money. We're Indians to tackle these oil bums. They're all alike. They blow their pay check the day they get it. They never have money. Say, you two—" he turned to Gortz and then to Jimmy to whom the watchman was whispering—"keep quiet! Quit talking! When we think the going's good we'll let you go, and not before. Understand?"

An hour of desert silence, an age of sixty hour-long minutes, dragged itself round the clock. The intense stillness of the vacant stretches over which the sable garmentry of night flung its hushing cloak was awing and oppressive.

The captives lay prone in the sand. Their guards sat near by, smoking and mute. Once some wild creature stirred in the brush, and the horses down in the wash uttered a frightened whinny. At times the evening breeze, coming in puffs, brought suggestions of confused sounds from afar. Finally there was a dull rumble, followed by the unmistakable whirr of a racing engine, and the tall highwayman rose and looked about him.

"Here, you, get up!" he told Gortz between kicks.

The watchman obeyed with alacrity.

"Now, run for your life," ordered his captor, facing him toward the open plain, extending to the Buena Vista hills in the east; and, with hands freed though still blindfolded, Gortz made off. He ran wildly, bumping into clumps of sagebrush, falling down, getting to his feet again, but he kept on his way, impelled by fear, and the cold-steel warning that had been laid none too gently against the nape of his neck, never realizing that he might unbandage his eyes.

"Drive back the way you came, kid," advised the short man as he put Jimmy into the wagon, "and don't look round, you understand, or we'll pepper you."

The boy grinned and started the horses on a run.

"Did you get it?" asked the taller of the two, taking off his mask.

"You bet I did. Here it is," and his companion thrust a folded object into his hand.

They were hurrying through the brush, but the leader stopped, struck a match, and examined the paper.

It was the note that Jimmy had given Gortz at the cabin.

VII

"PORTER, get that horse from the barn," directed Williams as Jimmy drove from the cabin with the watchman.

When the roustabout returned with the animal, the end of the sand-line was fastened to the singletree and drawn across the flat to the Empire well.

Kendall and the superintendent staggered over the uneven ground with their heavy burdens and safely deposited them on the derrick floor. A board was pried off the side of the belt-house, nearest the Bronze Duck camp, and through this opening the small wire rope was run.

This in turn they rove through a small block hanging directly above the well-head, but before fastening the end of the sand-line to the canisters, preparatory to lowering them into the well, they threaded it through a short but heavy length of cast-iron pipe of small diameter.

Porter put the horse back in the barn and took his place outside the rig to guard against surprise, leaving Kendall and Williams within. Fatty Kerr stood in the Bronze Duck derrick, alert, listening for the agreed signals, his hand on the throttle.

With detonating caps inserted, the three canisters with their heavy loads were introduced into the hole, and all was ready to lower away, when Porter whistled three times very softly.

"Lie low!" cautioned Kendall, listening.

"What'll we do?" whispered his companion.

"Stick it out. We can't drop this stuff and reel in the line, George. She'd go off

Digitized by Google

half-way down. We'd have a ruined well on our hands. The Empire gang'd make it criminally interesting if it was traced to us."

Williams shuddered at the suggestion.

"That sand-line, stretching across to our rig, is a dead give-away," he confided in Kendall's ear.

They flattened themselves on the derrick floor and waited. By the light in Gortz's shanty they could make out the forms of three men coming directly toward the derrick. Kendall's heart leaped into his mouth. He imagined he heard violent pulsings coming from the body sprawled beside him but they were from his own, for his temples throbbed incessantly.

The strangers approached. Their voices became more distinct. Kendall wriggled to the side of the derrick and peered through a cranny in the boarding.

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"What's up?" panted Williams from beside the well.

"That fool Porter's walking over to them. Jove! He's talking to them!"

For ten eternity-drawn minutes the four men outside the rig chatted in low confused tones.

Kendall and Williams writhed in tortured anxiety, the thread of suspense drawn almost to the breaking point. Both wondered what Kerr would think had happened. They knew he stood ready for action the instant the signal was given.

Then Kendall breathed with relief:

"Thank God! They've gone off toward the West Side Petroleum camp!"

"I didn't think Porter had that much sense," enthused the amazed superintendent. "Listen! He's talking loud on purpose. Whew! That was a close squeak!"

They waited until the loud voices died away in the distance, and then Kendall whistled two long blasts, followed by three short ones—the signal for Kerr to lower away.

Williams grasped the makeshift go-devil with both hands as the line began to pass swiftly through the pulley overhead.

"Better tie that contraption up somehow with a piece of soft rope," urged Kendall. "You don't want to drop the danged thing now."

"I should say not," retorted his friend, and, in the dark they fastened the heavy pipe to the block above the well-head.

"How're we going to see the white cloth?"

"Dead easy." Williams produced a box of matches and shook it.

"Don't! The gas!" Kendall shrieked as his companion started to strike a match.

"Oof! I never thought of that," the other grunted.

Kendall leaned over the well and sniffed.

"Get any?"

"Think I do. You try."

The superintendent bent over the hole.

"Well?" questioned the owner of the Bronze Duck uneasily.

"Can't tell. We'll chance it. We've got to. We must know the load is where we want it. Are you game, Steve?"

Kendall was silent. He tried to imagine what would happen if the gas in the well exploded. Would it set off the dynamite in the canisters? If it did, what would be the result?

"Are you game, Steve?" repeated Williams.

Kendall mumbled an uncertain assent, and he felt his voice tremble.

Williams struck the match.

A sudden flare with the power of a searchlight illumined the rig, beating back the impenetrable, obliterating darkness, tipping projecting objects with a fringe of light, while the anxious furrows on the two faces were filled with black, dancing shadows that gave a ghastly pallor to the skin.

Both glanced at the line coming into the derrick. As they did the canisters struck the water in the well five hundred feet below, and the wire rope ran slower.

"No gas! Thank God!" Kendall voiced his relief in a ghostly strangle.

"Same here!" chimed Williams with a nervous, unpleasant laugh.

The rope ran slower and slower, scraping lazily against the sides of the casing with a sleepy, metallic whine. Then they heard Kerr strike the drilling stem, hanging in their derrick, a ringing blow. The first bit of white cloth had passed him. That was the signal. The loaded canisters were nineteen hundred feet below them now.

Unrelaxing in their vigil they watched the line by the fitful flames of successive matches. A long unbroken silence, marred only by sputtering scratchings, and the stem rang again. The rope slackened. It came to a stop. The white cloth balanced with the spring of the line and rested level with the casing-head.

Digitized by Google

"She's there!" exulted Williams in an awing whisper.

"Yes, she's 3200 feet below us now," agreed Kendall. He reached up and untied the go-devil. "Do you realize, George, we're about to do something that means jail if discovered?"

Williams looked up from his task of gathering all telltale evidence of their visit.

"Yes, I realize it," he admitted solemnly. The last match burned to the end. "I look at it this way: it's your land till they pay you the money or get a well, and——"

"Hold on there, George. We haven't time for argument. Besides this is no place. Ready?" Kendall was chuckling.

The superintendent answered, and moved to the walk outside. Kendall held the heavy pipe firmly in his hands and carefully lowered it to the well-head.

"Get ready to run!" he shouted as the weight slipped from his fingers.

For an instant he stood, listening to the rumble and to the sounds of scraping metal as the go-devil slid down, gathering momentum at every foot, then he turned and followed Williams in a mad race for their own property.

They had not reached the gully behind the derrick when Williams looked over his shoulder.

"That light! That light!" he gasped, facing about and pointing to the lamp in the watchman's cabin. "If she flows and makes gas that'll set her afire!"

Kendall gave one glance at the possible source of danger, and with harelike agility turned in his tracks. Back over the sagebrush he flew, threw himself into Gortz's shanty, blew out the lamp and slammed the door.

As he started again for the Bronze Duck camp the earth trembled. A thundering roar rent the night, followed by a crashing of derrick lumber where the upward rush of water, oil, stones, and pieces of casing tore against the upper bents of the rig and the crown block.

At the sound of the explosion Kerr began to reel in the line, now freed from its burden, and as Kendall ran he could hear the engine in his own rig rattling madly as it accomplished the task.

"Look at her! Look at her, George!" he cried, panting, as he stumbled into Williams's arms. "Look at her against the moon coming up over the Buena Vista hills! She's shooting a hundred and fifty feet in the air! She's doing two thousand barrels, if she's doing a pint! Man, the spray comes 'way over here!"

"She'll be a pillar of fire if we don't get the fires out under our boilers," the superintendent admonished, and, freeing himself from Kendall's joyous arms, ran to turn off the oil in the fireboxes.

VIII

THE news that the Empire well had broken loose spread rapidly. Within fifteen minutes a curious crowd began to gather at the new gusher. During the excitement Jimmy returned with the team. Almost immediately after came the arrival of Ollie Carroll, the Empire's superintendent, in his big red car.

"Some well, Ollie!" was Kendall's shouted greeting as the automobile came to a stop just without the circle formed by the falling oil.

"Well be blowed!" grunted Carroll savagely. "This is a swell layout! How in blazes are we going to get her under control? What time did she come in, eh? Maclean told me at supper she was quiet as a mouse. Then, fifteen minutes ago, Goddard of the West Side Petroleum telephoned that the lid was off, and I'd better come a-running to see she didn't catch fire."

Kendall grinned broadly and, walking off, made his way to the Bronze Duck office where Jimmy Kerr and his father were standing.

"Isn't she a beauty, Fatty? Now, isn't she?" he repeated joyously, and the satisfaction of victory sat on his brow like the laurels of conqueror as he grasped their hands and thanked father and son volubly. "Oh, this is some night, I tell you, Fatty! Some night!"

"There comes Maclean and his crew, Steve." The head-driller indicated an arriving machine packed with workmen. "Guess they're going to get a shut-off valve over her. Afraid she'll blow herself to pieces, eh?"

Kendall nodded and strutted gloatingly toward Maclean.

"Thirsty, Mac?" he shouted when within hailing. "Here's a dandy chance to quench it, old man. You said you'd drink all she made, remember." He slapped his thigh,

Digitized by Google

doubling with laughter, as Maclean shook his fist at him.

"You go to ——!" the straw-boss raved at him. "You and your whole bunch, you understand?" He turned an angry back, and, calling his men about him, instructed them as to what they should do.

Gortz found his way back during the excitement. He mingled with the crowd, talking wildly, explaining the sudden flowing of the well with extravagant details, and endeavoring, despite much-shaken nerves, to appear natural and at ease. In the turmoil his absence had passed unnoticed.

The crew of the Bronze Duck were the most interested of the many spectators. They watched the hastily summoned scraper teams at work throwing up sumps to catch the falling oil. They stood by and cheered lustily when at midnight the Empire crew succeeded in placing the heavy valve over the well, and then, when the gusher was under control, and the feathery black plume of spouting oil had vanished from the moonlit sky, they wandered off to bed, tired and contented.

Arm in arm, Williams and Kendall entered the little office.

"George," Kendall stammered, "I want to—to thank——" He could get no farther.

"I know," Williams patted him on the shoulder with the same sympathy a father would show a child, "I know, old man."

"No, you don't," faltered Kendall. For an instant he bit his trembling lip, then blurted out: "You get an eighth interest in both the Bronze Duck and the money I get from the Empire for tonight's work. Another eighth I'll divide among the boys, including Jimmy."

Each sought the other's hand, and, as they clasped, their eyes met. The awkward silence that ever follows the acknowledgment of feeling by strong men was broken by Williams's nervous laugh.

"Steve, we're both tired," he said with a little catch. "I vote we go to bed."

IX

THE next afternoon Kendall stood at the open door of his own derrick, watching the crew at work with the casing spear. At the third trial they had succeeded in getting a hold on the collapsed casing, and were about to put a strain on the line preparatory to pulling the pipe from the well.

Unnoticed, Gunn, the discharged driller, approached stealthily from behind.

"I want my money," he demanded insolently, laying his hand roughly on Kendall's shoulder and whirling him about.

"You'll get it as soon as I get back to San Francisco," Kendall told him pleasantly, endeavoring to avoid trouble, for the man was both drunk and ugly.

"You white-livered ——! You'll pay me now, d'yer hear?" Gunn yelled at him, and raised his clenched fists to strike.

The men in the derrick rushed forward to interfere, but Kendall waved them off. "If this drunken bum, this crook wants to take me on I'm ready for him. It'll give me a lot of pleasure to take my satisfaction out of his hide. A derrick's no place to fight. Come outside," he ordered and sprang to the ground from the walk.

The crew crowded intently forward, eager, expectant, silent with excitement.

Gunn's eyes were bloodshot. His face was set in a savage leer. With a howl of rage he rushed and swung at the man before him who waited the onset calmly.

"I'll kill you!" Gunn bellowed as his blind blow missed and he lunged forward staggering. "I'll kill you."

Kendall moved quickly. His fists shot out two smashing blows that caught Gunn's jaw and right ear, and sent him sprawling to the ground where his head impacted with a hollow thump.

There he lay staring at the sky, his eyes rolling vacantly.

"Give me that derrick bucket, Fatty," called Kendall, and, after throwing the contents in the stricken man's face, he leaned over to examine him.

"What's the matter? Did I drop that pipe all right, Ollie?" the prostrate driller babbled in a daze.

"Oh, you dropped it all right! How do you feel, Gunn? This is Kendall."

"What! Kendall!" gasped the suddenly sobered Gunn.

"Yes, Kendall. And when you feel like talking I want you to come to the office."

"I didn't mean——"

"Get up," the owner of the property commanded roughly, but he put out his hand and helped the man to his feet. "Go wash your face. I'll wait in the office for you," he told him and strode off.

Digitized by Google

Five minutes later Gunn crept into the room where Kendall sat.

"How much did the Empire bunch give you to drop the pipe in my well?" was the indignant question that greeted him as the door closed behind him.

"Ollie Carroll and Jim Cliff gave me five gold twenties," sniffed Gunn.

"And you fell for it!" roared Kendall. "Sold yourself for a hundred dollars! What made you need money that bad? Come, I want the truth!"

Gunn hesitated, his shifting eyes avoiding his questioner.

"Whisky, eh?"

"Partly," he acknowledged with truth.

Kendall regarded him with pity.

"Get a grip on yourself, Bill Gunn. For old time's sake I'll try and get you started right again. Give up the booze, and I'll send you out to Burmah. They always need American drillers there. You're too good an oilman to go to the bad, Bill," he added finally after Gunn, in the presence of a notary, summoned for the purpose, had made an affidavit telling in his own words of the dealings he had had with Carroll and Cliff, the superintendent and vice-president of the Empire Consolidated Oil Company.

"And remember," Kendall called after him as he walked away, "when you think you want to start, drop me a line and I'll send you the money."

IT TOOK ten days to repair the damage to the Bronze Duck well, and a week later it came in, flowing five hundred barrels a day.

Kendall walked into the Empire's office in San Francisco one morning with a copy of Gunn's affidavit in his hand, the original in his pocket. The month was up. During the thirty days the Empire's gusher had produced steadily, never falling below fifteen hundred barrels each twenty-four hours.

"Cliff," Kendall suggested, leaning over the vice-president's desk, "I think you Empire people want to buy the Bronze Duck. You'll agree with me when you've read this," he added, laying down the copy of the affidavit.

"What's your price?" asked the Empire man solicitously, and without raising his eyes from the paper in his hand.

"My notes back and two thousand an acre," Kendall told him simply.

"And do I get the original of this?" Cliff held up the affidavit.

"Uh-huh! You do," Kendall said and grinned.

"We'll buy in that case," was the ready decision.

"I thought you would. Well, make out your papers and let's have the business over. Taking the Bronze Duck at two thousand an acre, you owe me $540,000, old man. I want the check certified, you understand?" and Kendall chuckled contentedly as he gave Cliff a knowing wink.

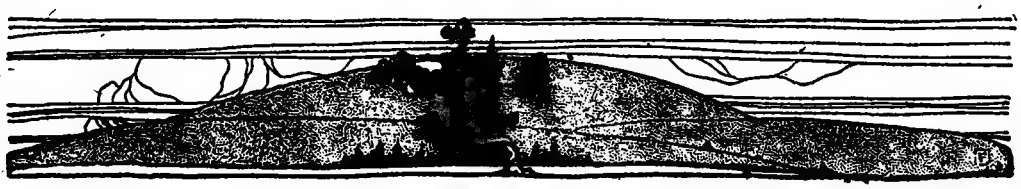
Late the same afternoon Kendall appeared at the cashier's desk in the Second National Bank.

"Mac," he said with an expansive smile, "run your eye over that." He handed him the Empire's check.

Macdonald whistled.

"Put it in your strong box, Mac, and give me cashier's checks for the following amounts in the names set before each." And Stephen Kendall placed before the astonished banker an old envelope on which was written in pencil this list:

George Williams	$67,500
Fatty Kerr	13,500
Jimmy Kerr	13,500
Hank Dodge	13,500
Ted Smith	13,500
Fred Porter	13,500



Digitized by Google

GUIDING CLEMENTINE

by KATHRENE and ROBERT PINKERTON

Authors of "The Iron Factor"

MILK? No sir, unless you call jamming the heel of an ax blade into a canned cow milking. Except for the painted bossies on the cans, I haven't seen one for ten years, and when you talk of milking it makes me feel the same way as when I hear of some Englishman "taking a shooting trip in the colonies." I guided one once, and do you know while I was waiting for him I had the same hunch of trouble coming as the time I got careless and hired out as a milker.

Any one would have done it same as I did. Me and Frank Page paddled into Sabawee with our bear hides. We were ten rods from the store when Conner saw us coming. He opens the door and yells:

"Hey, Billy! Can you milk?"

Frank and I have twelve fine hides and we are feeling sort of chesty, so I hollers back—

"I can milk anything on four legs."

Conner ducked out of the door and up to the station without another word. We had the hides spread out in the store when he got back.

"You're hired," he said. "I thought you boys were never coming in. Another day and you'd have missed out."

"On what?" asks Frank.

"Party wants two good guides who can paddle, pack and cook. They wired two days ago and will be here in the morning."

"That's us," I says, thinking how lucky we were to get a job soon as bear-trapping was over.

"Good sports, too," Conner goes on. "The fellow that wired is a joker," and he handed me the telegram. It's like this:

"Get me two reliable guides, good packers, canoemen and cooks. Arrive June twentieth. One must know how to milk. Edgar C. Cassels."

"What's he mean, milk?" I asks Conner.

"That must be his little joke," he laughs. "You boys ought to have a good time with them."

Seein's how I was the one that bit on the joke, I had an uneasy sort of feeling. I guess I showed it, because Frank said:

"That's a mistake, that milk. These kid operators never get things straight. The fellow means walk. He probably thinks we paddle so much up here we've lost the use of our legs."

But my hunch of trouble was still with me when Frank and I sat on the platform the next morning waiting for the passenger. I knew there must have been a mistake, or the fellow was joking, as Conner said. In the first place, there wasn't anything to milk. There never had been a cow in Sabawee. In the second place, there was the fellow's canoes on the platform, come in by express the day before. They was big canoes, eighteen-footers, but I didn't see how you could take a cow in them.

Even if I didn't think any one would bring a cow, I felt more and more uneasy. My head told me no one would be crazy enough to try it, that it couldn't be done, but something else kept whispering—

"Billy Richards, you've let your fool mouth loose again and something's going to happen."

The train came in and a young fellow

Digitized by Google

hops off with a baby in his arms. Then came two ladies. Frank and I didn't pay any attention to them. We figured on a party of men, and I was keeping an eye peeled for a live-stock car and a cow in it. But there wasn't any, and we'd about decided our party'd missed the train when the fellow with the baby came up to us.

"Are you Billy Richards and Frank Page?" he asks.

We says yes, wondering how he knew, and he hurries on:

"I'm Mr. Cassels. Conner wired he had engaged you. I'm glad you're on hand. My dear," and he turned to one of the ladies who had come up, "take William Gordon while I look after the luggage. These are the guides, Billy and Frank. Boys, this is Mrs. Cassels and her sister, Miss Wipplinger. Now we'll get Clementine," and he starts for the express car, us following.

I don't know whether it was his pleasant manner or his sister-in-law that made me forget all about milking. She was as pretty a girl as I ever saw in the bush, and I made up my mind right there I'd paddle her canoe. Anyhow, we went down to the express car and just as we got to it the messenger came flying out of the door with a jump that took him across the platform.

"He's loose!" he hollers, looking scared over his shoulder as he started for the station. "Watch out, you fellows. He's a devil."

"He means Clementine," says Cassels. "She's perfectly harmless. We'll get her out."

I WAS ahead and took a peak in the car door, but I got back twice as fast as that time I stepped around a boulder and almost shook hands with a bear. I was looking into the ugliest little face you ever saw.

"What is it?" I asks Cassels when I could gather up the words, though I knew perfectly well it was a goat, a goat with whiskers and sharp little horns and a bad eye.

"That," says he, "is the solution of the greatest problem that ever confronted a man, yes, the greatest that ever confronted a married man. That, Billy, is Clementine, Clementine who makes it possible for me to be here, who makes it possible for William Gordon, at the age of eighteen weeks, to take his first canoe trip in this wonderful virgin wilderness of Canada."

"You mean the baby is so fond of the goat he wouldn't come without it?" I asks, kind of dazed.

"He is so fond of his six meals a day that we couldn't come without the proper food for him. We despaired, until a friend gave us Clementine."

"You could have saved the express," I told him, seeing light at last. "As soon as we get ten miles from town I could get you all the fresh meat you want."

Cassels looked at me a moment sort of stern, just as if he thought I was joking with him.

"Didn't Conner show you my telegram?" he asks.

That's the time my knees got the weakest they have since I was eleven months and eight days old. It hit me all of a sudden that no kid operator had made a mistake and that Cassels was more serious than most men get.

"But," I says, and I was gloming around for words and breath, "no one said anything about milking goats."

"You said you could milk anything on four legs," shouts some one behind me, and I turns to see Conner standing there grinning. "Ain't that right, Frank?" he asks, and Frank nods his head.

"I asked for a man who could milk," says Cassels, "and any man that can milk a cow can milk a goat. She's gentle as a lamb."

I turned to Frank, sort of helpless. Frank never shows what he thinks or how he feels, but we've been partners a long time.

"Frank," I says, "you lived on a farm once. You know how to milk."

"I never hung out my face for a milker and you did," he answers scared like.

"Get that thing out of the car and do it quick," yells the conductor behind us just then, and Cassels and Frank and Conner and I each grabs a handful of wool and pulls. Clementine makes a little jump and lands down among us and stands there so peaceable and cute like that I begin to think it won't be so bad after all. The express messenger hops in and throws out a chain that was broke and we tied her to a box car on the siding.

"Now you boys get the luggage and canoes down to the lake," says Cassels, "while I go to the store and have the grub put up."

Digitized by Google

"There's a nice camping place about a mile from town that you'd like," I says, "and there's an Indian trail along the shore so we can lead the goat down."

"I don't believe you understand," Cassels tells me, looking kind of hard. "We're going to White Otter Lake and then on to Kahshaboie Lake and back here, and Clementine is going with us."

It wasn't the way he said it, for no man ever scared me with just his mouth, but it was a picture I had of getting that goat into a canoe and making her stay there. I turned around to talk it over with Frank, but he was already under a canoe. I picked up the other and followed him. When I set it down on the shore he was ready for me.

"I know what you want to say," he says before I could open my mouth. "But it's your own fault that got us into this mess. If you hadn't been so quick on the brag we'd have been all right."

He turns and leaves, and I follows him back after a load of duffle. And I didn't try to say anything more, because I knew he was right.

But an hour later, when we were all ready to start, I began to feel better. I had led Clementine down to the lake, and she came peaceful as a pet moose calf. I had caught another glimpse of Miss Wipplinger and I had begun to scheme on getting her into my canoe. But I didn't have to.

"Now, Billy," Cassels tells me as we begin to load up, "since you are the milker you take Clementine with you. I don't like to have William Gordon in the same canoe with the goat, so Mrs. Cassels and I will go with Frank and Natalie and Clementine with you."

That was agreeable to me, and Frank and I began to load the canoes according to the passengers.

"That's a nasty wind," whispers Frank, "and it'll be worse when we get out of this bay. Try and get him to lay up until it quits."

So I goes to Cassels and tells him it's pretty rough, especially for a goat and a baby, neither of them having been out before. As a matter of fact, Frank and I didn't know how him or his sister-in-law could paddle, and if there's anything a guide hates it's a sport that don't know anything about a canoe in a wind.

"Rough, nothing!" says Cassels kind of sharp. "Mrs. Cassels and I have been out in lots worse weather. Of course, if it's too rough for you——"

I turned and grabbed Clementine's chain.

Clementine wasn't very heavy, and we had a lot of duffle and grub. So I loaded the heavy stuff back of the middle and left a place for the goat ahead. The last thing I threw my own little pack of blankets and dry socks between her and the girl, and we were ready.

Honest, that Miss Wipplinger was so pretty that I forgave the way she got into the canoe. But it didn't make me forget Cassels and the wind, and I shoved off quick as I could.

"Now, Billy, you must teach me to paddle," says the girl.

"Sure, Natalie," I answers quite cheerful. I've always figured that my first name ain't any worse than any one else's.

She looks around, sort of startled, and then she laughs right out and begins to paddle. She was sure a nice girl.

Now, don't get the idea I lost my head about her. If I ever get married it'll be a girl who lives in the bush. But guiding's hard work and it makes it a lot easier to have some one along you like.

But there was too good a sea running to think long about such things and I was still mad. So I shoves her nose into it and about the third wave climbs in over the bow and sits down in Natalie's lap. She lets out a little scream and drops her paddle. I picked it up as it passed and yelled to her to keep quiet.

"You can't paddle now," I says, "so you'd better sit right down on the bottom and not move. You can take lessons when it's more calm."

She did as I said and I never had a bit of trouble with her on that trip. Clementine was just as good. She lay there in the bottom, chewing her cud and not paying attention to anything. I had my troubles though for it was a stiff, squally wind, and it was me alone to shove that heavy canoe. Cassels could help some and he and Frank soon caught up and passed me. Frank winked as he went by, and I could see him shoving her hard into every whitecap that came along.

I finally got out of the bay and turned into the big stretch, where the wind was on the side, and maybe I didn't have my troubles. We hit some big rollers, the

Digitized by Google

kind that make you seasick when they drop out from under you, and I could see Natalie's knuckles were white where she hung onto the gunwales.

After half an hour Clementine woke up. She looked over the side and sees a big wave right above her, so she gets to her feet.

"Lie down!" I yells, but she don't pay any attention.

She just stood there, balancing with the sway and looking all around. That was the only time I was ever really scared in a canoe. If that goat didn't lie down we went over. I could see it coming sure in the next squall. We were a good mile from shore, and right in the middle of the big stretch where the rollers were worst. I couldn't even swear.

And then all of a sudden Clementine turns around once, like a dog, and lies down again, this time with her head toward the front. Honest, I never thought goats was so sensible, and I began to think I was really going to enjoy that trip. Natalie was just the kind of girl I like to see in the bush and Cassels was all right except that being a father was still new to him.

That's when I saw Clementine swallow as if she was going to choke. She must have been swallowing her cud, I guess, but at last she got it down. Then she perked up. She nibbled the gunwale and then my spare paddle. But they didn't interest her long, and she looked around kind of curious. The first thing she saw was my pack-sack right under her nose, and she started in.

Honest, I've heard what goats will eat, but I never believed it till then. She chewed off a strap first and then got her nose inside. I hollered at her but it didn't do no good, and Natalie was too scared to turn around. I didn't dare quit paddling for a second because we were in the worst of it and I had to stay there in the stern and watch her go through my duffle.

She yanked out one sock and then another. None of them seemed to suit and she'd give a flip and let them sail away in the wind. She hauled out my spare shirt and chewed a hole in the front of it and then she found my shaving-bag and gave me a three-weeks beard.

It was a good half-hour before I finally got to the west shore, where Frank and Cassels had landed, and maybe I wasn't boiling. As soon as Natalie was out I grabbed Clementine's chain and nearly yanked her head off. Before she had two feet on shore I hauled off with my right foot and nearly broke a toe on her.

There was a screech from the others and Mrs. Cassels came running toward me.

"Stop it!" she yells. "You'll ruin our trip."

"Ruin's already started," I says. "Look at my pack."

"But you mustn't mistreat Clementine," she says, more calm. "It will affect William Gordon so."

I just looked at her with my mouth open.

"You know," she goes on, "any milk-producing animal must, above all things, have peace and quiet. They must never be disturbed, frightened or beaten. They must always be kept contented. Otherwise the milk is seriously affected, both in quality and quantity, and we must have the best for William Gordon."

I wasn't in any humor to care much about William Gordon, and I led Clementine to a sapling and tied her. Then Frank and I got lunch. I was for camping right there, but at noon the wind went down and I knew it would get dead calm and then switch to the west. That would give us a chance to get to the portage and make the good camping-place on Loon Lake that night.

THE wind did switch and about four o'clock we hit the portage. It starts out in the worst place on the lake, right through a swamp, and the landing is the wettest, boggiest, mosquito-est place I know of. When I hit shore Clementine jumped out, stretched her legs and tried the moss. She liked it first-rate and we didn't tie her.

"Now," says Cassels when we were unloading, "I'll start ahead and lead Clementine so that you boys will be free to do the packing."

That suited me fine, and while I was fixing the paddles to take the canoe across he started.

That is, he started, but Clementine didn't.

"Come, Clementine," he says, gentle enough to suit his wife.

But Clementine didn't lift her head. He gives a tug at the chain, but she doesn't start.

"Come on," he says a little rough and pulling harder.

Digitized by Google

But that goat was too interested in the moss and wouldn't move. Cassels gives a yank and hollers—

"Come along, now!"

"Edgar!" says his wife in that tone I never heard any one but a wife have.

"But he won't start," he tells her kind of peevish.

"Coax her, dear," she says. "Let me show you."

She starts to pet Clementine, but the goat turns on her quick, head down.

"Frank, help me start her," says Cassels.

Frank jerks his head my way, saying—

"He's the milker and ought to have the most influence."

I laid my hand on her back. She turns end for end so quick I don't know it and her little horns hit me in the leg and I sit down in the swamp, the muddy water splashing all over Cassels's new riding-pants.

Well, sir, that was only the start. Everybody had something to suggest, but either they didn't work or Mrs. Cassels decided they would disturb Clementine. The goat kept eating moss and finally, when suppertime come, Cassels, who'd been getting madder and madder, told us to pitch camp right there.

I jumped for a pack and Cassels told me to tie Clementine.

"We haven't any rigging heavy enough," I says, going on with the work.

There wasn't any choice of a dry place for the tents. We laid down a lot of brush, but it didn't do much good, and we had to stand to eat. I never saw a worse camp.

"Where's Clementine?" asks Natalie when I was helping her to the tea.

Everybody looked where the goat had been, but she wasn't there.

"She's going up the trail," shouts Mrs. Cassels. "Stop her, quick!"

I had planned to try milking her while the others was eating, cause I didn't want even Frank to see the first time. So I grabs my little pail and starts across the portage after the goat.

But it was just as easy to stop her as it was to start her. I got in her way and grabbed her wool and I even took hold of her horns, once. But she was set on seeing Loon Lake and finally I let her have her way and tagged along.

About five rods from the end of the portage she stopped sudden and began to eat a balsam sapling. That was my chance, and I squats down with the pail on the ground and tries to milk her. And do you know, she give down fine for about five minutes. I was just beginning to feel chesty about it when all of a sudden she walks over to another balsam. I don't know yet how I saved that pail of milk.

I moved over, too, but she moved on.

"You trap-robbing wolverine!" I yells, losing my temper and hitting her with my fist. "Stand still or I'll hamstring you!"

Clementine looks around sort of startled and then goes to eating peaceful again, and I starts milking.

Boys, oh boys, but the flies was thick in that place. I'd milk with one hand and fight 'em with the other, and I was getting madder and madder and not noticing anything else.

"My dear sir," comes a voice behind me, "would you be so good as to please tell me what you are doing?"

"Sure," I says without looking around. "I'm driving the Rocky Mountain express on the C. P. R."

"So I perceive," he says with all the artificial ice he could get in his voice. "But why this, and here of all places?"

"I'm running a milk route," I answers without turning around.

I don't need to turn. I knows exactly what he looks like and what he is. The bush is full of them in Summer, and sometimes when I've been out of luck I've guided them.

"I'm running a milk-route and the trails was too bad for my wagon, so I drive the herd around instead. Then my customers know they get it fresh. No, I can't spare you a quart. I have a high-class trade and every drop's spoken for in advance."

"Oh, Bruce, come here," calls the fellow, and I heard another lad coming through the brush from the lake.

"*Bo'jou*'," says the new fellow, and I looks around quick and friendly and says "*Bo'jou*'," too. "It's been a nice day, hasn't it?"

"Fine," he says. "She gives down well."

Funny, isn't it, how you cotton to some fellows the first time they speak and how you haven't any use for others before they open their mouths. This second lad had on a pair of wool pants with one leg rolled up higher than the other, a gray flannel shirt, shoepacs and a light felt hat. He had the face of a fellow you'd like to meet when you was sick of every one else you ever knew.

Digitized by Google

You could see first crack he was from some big city in the States, and you'd know just as quick he was a good man in the bush, though he'd never tell you so.

The other one was just as I knew he would be. Like Cassels, he had on riding-pants of that stiff stuff that makes a man look so husky from the front, only when you get a side view you see he's just like the trees they paint on the stage. His pants was clean, too, and his high-laced shoes looked like he'd just had them shined, and his silk shirt had a red tie on it, and his hat was one of those perky kind.

Just then Clementine decided she'd stood for enough and walked off. I set down the pail and tied her chain to a sapling.

"This is the end of the route," I says. "I'll deliver this and eat supper."

"You're not going to leave that goat near our camp," says the silk-shirt fellow.

"I leave that goat just where she wants to be left," I answers. "Angels couldn't do any more."

"Live across the portage?" asks the fellow called Bruce.

"For tonight," I tells him, "and if you hears cries for help don't get excited. It'll be just the ladies thinking they're drowning when the bog settles under their beds."

"Ladies," says silk shirt, forgetting the goat.

"Why didn't you camp on this end of the portage?" asks Bruce.

So I tells him what happened, and silk shirt is for going over right away.

"We might offer the women our camp for tonight," says Bruce. "They can't sleep in the muskeg."

The other one starts quick across the portage. Bruce followed along with me and the milk. I find they've been out a week and expect to be out two or three more and that they haven't a guide.

When we get to camp there's silk shirt, his hat off, bowing to the women and shaking hands with Cassels. He doesn't know Frank's there.

"I'm Delamere Magee," he says, as if they ought to know him at once, "and having learned from your guide of what has happened, I have come to offer to the ladies my tent and bed for the night. They will have a dry place to sleep, and a breeze on the other lake will minimize the mosquito nuisance."

"It would be better for William Gordon, wouldn't it, Edgar?" says Mrs. Cassels.

But I see it's Natalie and not William Gordon that Delamere Magee is thinking about and, sure enough, when they finally do start, me packing over a lot of stuff for William Gordon, it's Magee ahead helping Natalie over all the roots and rocks in the trail.

Boys, oh boys, that was some night that me and Frank put in there in the muskeg. We lay in water until midnight, and then we took our wet blankets and went across the portage and laid down on the sand at Loon Lake. Frank was boiling by morning, for the breeze went down and the flies got us right. Before daylight we built a smudge.

"There's one thing certain," says Frank. "We've got to get rid of that goat."

That's what I'd been thinking ever since we first saw it, but I wanted him to say so first.

"Babies in the bush eat canned milk and it won't kill this one," Frank goes on. "That Clementine is going to lead us from one thing to another until one of us gets so mad we'll kill her. It's better to do it now and save trouble."

"It's funny how they look at things," I answers.

"There wasn't anything funny in how she made us sleep in the swamp last night," he says.

"I was thinking of Natalie," I tells him, and he forgets Clementine, too. "Here's this Bruce Greydon, the kind of a fellow you and me'd guide for nothing, and she never sees him at all. But this Delamere Magee, with his fancy pants and red tie and all his talk about where he's been and what he's shot, kills her dead. To hear him talk you'd think he'd slew everything that ever growed in any country, while he's spent the greater part of his life roughing it in the wilds, as he tells it."

"I notice, though," says Frank, "that Greydon's got all the bacon grease on his pants, and the best set of paddle blisters on his hands and all the mud on his shoepacs, and I'd bet anything he does ninety per cent. of the packing."

"Sure," I adds. "He's a real fellow and Natalie's too nice a girl for them not to get together. Marryin's a serious thing and we mustn't let her make any mistake about this Magee."

"It's the goat's fault," says Frank, looking around to where Clementine was tied.

Digitized by Google

Then he looks at me, and I looks at him, and we both looks at Clementine. Then I gets up and starts for her. Frank and me's been partners so long we don't always have to talk.

Well, I take that goat back over a ridge, down through a swamp up on to the next ridge and then shoves her down the other side. I broke her chain with a rock and took the other end back and fastened it to the sapling where she'd been tied.

"Straight north," I tells Frank when I gets back to the smudge. "When every one turns out to find her we'll go that way."

DAYLIGHT come and then the sun. We lay there beside the smudge, trying to get a wink, but the flies was too bad.

"It's funny how they act," I says when we have the smoke going good. "Women is always that way. I can't remember one outfit we've guided where we could understand how they happened to snare what they did on the husband runway. And Natalie's a darned nice girl."

"She's too darned nice for that Maggie fellow, though that ain't saying much for her," Frank whispers. "We've got to do something to break his paddle in this game."

"It ought to be easy," I tells him. "It's only a cheap pine one fixed up with a lot of varnish. Those kind always crack soon's you put any weight on them."

About five o'clock Natalie comes out of the tent. She sees us sitting by the smudge and walks over.

"It's a glorious morning, isn't it?" she says as friendly as could be. "That was my first night in a tent, and it was wonderful."

Frank and I don't say much, having just been talking about her, and she looks down the trail.

"Where's Clementine?" she asks, scared like.

"I'm sorry, miss," says Frank, sober as could be, "but Clementine got loose in the night. We've been hunting for her since before daylight but we can't find a trace."

"Clementine gone!" she cries. "What will William Gordon do?"

I'd noticed the day before that Natalie thinks an awful lot of that baby, and now she's so broke up I feel meaner than I would if I'd robbed a trap. I'm just going to say something about our having lots of canned milk when Natalie turns and runs to the tent. In a minute Mrs. Cassels is out, too, and then we've got the both of them on our hands.

Well, sir, those women carried on something awful. Finally when Frank got a chance he said something about canned milk. That starts Mrs. Cassels, and I'm glad it's Frank that springs it instead of me. From what she says, I gathered that they take more pains with babies now days than they used to, and I began to think how lucky I was that I ever growed up.

The more those women said the meaner Frank and me feels. Mrs. Cassels don't grade with Natalie, but she's a darned nice little woman. After she calms down she tells us that they must go back immediately for they can never feed William Gordon on anything but milk from something they're personally acquainted with.

"Edgar and I have planned this trip for three years," she says, "but always something happened to prevent our coming. This year there was William Gordon, but Clementine solved that problem, for we knew William Gordon would have the proper food if we had her. Our physician said that under no circumstances should we give him anything else."

Then she starts all over again and sits down on a log and cries. And, while she's crying, Cassels and Bruce Greydon and Maggie come across the portage. They've slept in the wet camp, or tried to sleep, from the looks of them, and they don't add any joy to that outfit. Cassels, of course, goes right up in the air like a partridge that's been shot in the head. Bruce looks at us and don't say nothing. Maggie gets where Natalie will see him and begins:

"There should be no need for worry," he says. "With five men to scour the woods, we will surely find her. But we must start at once. You," and he looks at Frank and me, "take the north side of the portage, Cassels and Bruce take the south side, and I'll search in between."

"Oh!" says Natalie, clapping her hands. "Do you think she can be found?"

"There is no doubt of it, Miss Wipplinger," Maggie tells her. "You and Mrs. Cassels may allay your fears. We'll have Clementine here in a few hours."

Of course, Frank and me hikes for the place where I turned the goat loose, thinking

Digitized by Google

she'll sure be there. We ain't figuring on hurrying right back with her, because that might tell something. But we want to make certain we find her.

But that goat ain't anywhere around. We take up her tracks, but she keeps to the rocky top of the ridge, and there ain't a sign. We think when we start it will be easy, but after an hour we begin to get scared and hunt right.

Well, sir, we hunted until ten o'clock. Twice I picked up her tracks, still going north, but she traveled on runways and you couldn't tell her hoof-prints from a deer's, unless you struck them in the mud. We'd separated, but when we runs into each other we decides to go back for something to eat. Cassels and Bruce has just got in when we get there, and sorrow's settling thicker every minute on that camp.

Nobody says much except William Gordon. He's doing enough shouting for all of us. I never knew before so small a baby could make so much noise, and with every new yell he lets out I feel meaner and meaner.

"Can't you quiet him?" Cassels asks.

"There's just one thing will quiet him," the missus snaps back, "and that's food. Don't you see? He's starving," and she begins to cry.

I see the tears in Natalie's eyes, too, and Cassels begins to open a can of milk without either of the women saying a word. Just as he starts to pour some into a cup of water Natalie jumps straight up in the air with a yell.

"There she is!" she cries, and we all look back at the portage trail.

There comes Delamere Magee leading Clementine. Everybody starts for him on the run, except Frank and me.

"See what you've done," whispers Frank. "You've made a hero of him and we've still got the goat."

After feeling so mean you'd think I was glad the goat was found, but I wasn't. I believe I'd rather have seen that baby get the rickets on canned milk than have that fellow be the one to find her.

"Nothing'll pry her loose from him now," Frank goes on.

"They will," I tells him, getting hotter and hotter. "They will, and it'll be Clementine that does it."

"What you going to do?" Frank asks.

"Leave that to me," I tells him, looking wise, though I ain't got any more idea in my head than a rabbit.

Maggie is holding forth on how he found the goat when we gets up to him.

"It was easy," he says, "for any one accustomed to tracking big game. I found her spoor back on the portage and tracked her to the south for three miles. It was like following a blazed trail."

"You followed her tracks through those woods!" says Natalie, looking at him in a way that makes me break off the top of a tooth. "How wonderful!"

Maggie passes it off as if it was nothing and turns to me and says:

"Here, my man. Tether her to a tree and see that you do so securely."

I could have killed him, but it wasn't my time to talk, and I ties Clementine and milks her and they feed William Gordon. He quits hollering and every one is happy; that is, every one except Frank and me.

We start across the portage to pack the stuff over and get breakfast. About halfway over I see where Maggie and Clementine comes on to the trail. But it's on the north side. We follows it into the brush and about a hundred yards back we see a lot of cigarette butts lying beside a windfall. The ground's all kicked up as if a man'd been sitting there swinging his feet.

"Now we will fix him," I says. "Three miles south! He didn't dare get more than three hundred feet away from the portage because he knew he couldn't find it again. And tracked her spoor! Clementine found him sitting here. Now I guess Natalie'll see what kind he is."

"She wouldn't believe it, nor any of the others," says Frank. "And, besides, we'd better not bring up this goat business again. It ain't safe."

So we have to let him be a hero, knowing all the time we're the ones that gave him the chance. But I made up my mind that if it can be done, Clementine's going to help fix Delamere Magee.

We get the stuff over and cook breakfast, though it's nearly noon. While we're eating the Cassels and Bruce and Magee fix it up to travel together. I'd been feeling as if I had an empty barrel inside of me, but that took away my appetite. And I noticed that Frank didn't eat much either.

Well, sir, I paddled that goat, and I coaxed her across portages and I milked her and I cussed her and, when no one else was

Digitized by Google

around, I kicked her, and all the time me and Frank was getting mad as a bear waking up in the Spring.

It wasn't so much Clementine that got us sore. We got used to her balking and doing everything else as she pleased. It was this Maggie man and the way he carried on with Natalie. It was easy to see from the first that she liked him. And he never let her get a chance to forget that he was the original bushman, hunter, explorer, discoverer and authority, though Frank and I could see he was about as handy in the bush as a wolf in water.

And all the time we were chumming up with this Greydon. I never saw a city lad who could handle himself better in a canoe or on shore, and we liked him so well we asked him to come up and visit us in our trapping cabin Christmas. It was the first time we ever did that.

We could see, too, that he was hit as hard by Natalie as she was by this Maggie man. That's the one thing we didn't like about him. He didn't seem to go after her the way we thought he should. He was polite and did little things for her, but she always thanked him with her eyes on Maggie.

One day in the canoe, when Clementine was acting up bad and had ate up the muzzle I fixed for her, I made up my mind to say some things. I ought to have known better, but, as I say, I was mad, and I butted in.

"Do you suppose that's just because she's a goat or because she's a female goat?" I asks when we are paddling along behind the others.

"What do you mean, Billy?" asks Natalie.

"Why, here we camped all night at a place where she could get the best kind of feed, feed that would agree with her and do her some good. But no sir. Instead, she begins right away to eat that muzzle of old leather that some Indian wore out in a dog harness. It's so dry and hard and no good you'd think she'd know better, wouldn't you?"

Natalie stops paddling and turns around to look at me.

"You always start in the middle or near the end, Billy," she says after a moment. "What's that got to do with her being a lady goat?"

Natalie may have lost her head about this Maggie fellow, but otherwise she was about as sensible as women get, and I had a feeling that she scented what I was at. But, as I said, I was mad, and I kept on.

"Why," I tells her, "I've noticed how women are the same way so much. If they've got a choice you never know whether they'll take the best or the worst. Men aren't that way. What's the reason?"

"It's generally believed that women let their hearts choose, Billy, that it's their intuition that decides for them," she says. "Men are supposed to use their heads. That's where they have the advantage," and she smiled at me. "Only, even if I were a man, I'd rather follow my heart than my head."

I saw right away she knew every thought I was thinking and was only making fun of me.

"May be so," I told her. "I had a pet crow once. She spent all her time picking up bright things. She seemed to have her heart set on them. But all the time the chipmunks was running away with the food I put out for her, and when I went away for two weeks she starved to death."

"But she had a nice little pile of bright things to look at before she died," says Natalie, beginning to paddle.

So you can see how much chance there was to do anything there.

Nights in our tents Frank and I didn't talk of much else. Every day we got sorer and sorer, and I guess the Cassels thought they'd got a couple of sure enough grouches for guides. All the time we was paddling we kept thinking of some way to fix this Maggie man, but something always happened and we didn't get a chance to try any of them.

The only thing in our favor was that Natalie still paddled with me. Then, on shore, she doesn't let her sister do all the work of tending to William Gordon but gets away with a lot of it herself. William Gordon has taken a shine to canoes, especially if there's a few waves to rock them. The Cassels see this right away and at 'most every camp they lay some blankets in the bottom and put him to sleep there. It's Natalie's job to sit on shore and watch him, and, of course, Maggie's always on hand to help her.

THE end of the second week out we were going down Bad Vermillion River. Frank and I wanted to stop north of the big swamp, but Cassels is one of these map-eaters. Every night he tells

Digitized by Google

how many miles we made that day and then he asks me can we get to such and such a place the next night.

I'd always look at Clementine when he'd ask me, and I got so I could tell, from the way she acted, how far we'd get. She'd broke her chain twice and we tied her with a rope. But she'd chew that through, and all our starts depended on whether the goat was on hand to go with us. They used to think it funny that she didn't wander off three miles again.

Well, when we got into the big swamp we had to keep going, for there was no place to camp, and it was after six o'clock before we hit the little falls and high ground. That meant a big rush when we landed, for with supper to get and camp to make and the goat to milk, we had our hands full.

Honest, I never knew a baby could keep so many people busy. You'd 'a' thought his mother or Natalie could have done it alone, but it took them and Cassels too. So he wasn't much help to Frank and me.

William Gordon was fretful that night because river travel was too smooth for him, and the first thing Cassels has to do is to put him in a canoe. We'd lifted the canoes out, but he puts one back and sets William Gordon in it and then ties the rope to the sapling I'd tied Clementine to.

Maggie had to wash one of his silk shirts, as he always did whenever Greydon needed help making camp. Natalie was sitting on a rock watching William Gordon, and of course Maggie had to wash his shirt where he could talk to her.

There was a little rip above the take-off of the portage and the eddy where William Gordon was floating was kind of foamy. So, after Maggie gets his shirt washed, he climbs into the canoe with the baby to get out to the clear water to rinse it.

I was setting up a tent right above them and I heard him telling about a trip he took up in Labrador and how swift the rivers was and how dangerous the rapids. To hear him talk, he'd run worse rips than we've got in our country and could handle a canoe good as an Indian.

As I said, we was late and everybody was busy, and Natalie was listening to Maggie, and Maggie was out in the canoe swishing his shirt around in the water to get the soap out of it. I'd just got that tent up and was going away from shore when I hears Natalie scream. I was quite a ways up the bank, but I could see right down to where they were. Natalie was standing up, waving her arms and shrieking, and Maggie and William Gordon was in the canoe going down-stream.

I didn't think much of it. The water was swift, of course, and they was right above the falls and the rapids. But there was a man in the canoe. Only that's where I was wrong.

Maggie stood up, took one look and then got down and crawled to the other end, going right over William Gordon. Just as he got to the end the eddy swung it near shore, and he hops out. The canoe jumps back, right out into the swift current. Maggie lands in two feet of water and climbs out, while William Gordon, tickled to death with the rocking of his cradle, is shooting straight down-stream for the falls and sure death.

Of course, soon as Maggie jumped, Frank and me was in motion. But we ran like porcupines, compared with what went past us. I got a flash of a gray shirt and the next thing I knew Bruce Greydon was going through the air and hitting the water twenty feet from shore, right behind the canoe.

Now I figure that anybody can be a hero if he gets the chance. All you have to do is lose your head and do something rash. But it takes a real man to be a hero and keep his head while he's doing it.

Bruce Greydon was that sort. As soon as he started he must have seen there wasn't any paddle in that canoe, and as he ran to the river he picked one up. He still had it when he came to the top of the water and struck out after William Gordon.

Boys, oh boys, but there was some noise on that river bank just then. Natalie and Mrs. Cassels was going with full lung power, and Cassels was standing there whispering swear words and then just shouting. Frank and me didn't wait to listen, though. As soon as Bruce took his long drive we started down-stream.

It wasn't that we expected to do anything. The little falls of the Bad Vermilion and the rips above them are as nasty water as I care to see. I heard there used to be an Indian who run them, but I never saw any one who wanted to try it. Frank and I knew that Bruce was a goner, and William Gordon, too, but we headed down-stream, thinking that we might pick up the pieces.

Bruce got to the canoe just before it hit the rips. He grabbed the stern and got his

Digitized by Google

paddle inside, and then he just hung on while he went through the white water. Frank and me was alongside and we could see him working his legs and one arm trying to guide that pitching eighteen-footer between the boulders and at the same time keep her headed so she wouldn't fill in the backlash.

It wasn't more than a second before he was through and into the smooth, straight shoot above the falls. He grabs the canoe with both hands, gives a lift and, quick as a flip of a lynx's tail, was sitting straddle the stern. He caught his balance just an instant and then he's inside with the paddle in his hands. I've seen that trick done in calm water, and I've done it myself, but never in a place like that.

As soon as Bruce gets in he stands up, guiding the canoe straight toward the falls. He looks down-stream quick and then he goes to his knees and begins to paddle. With two shoves he lifted that rearing beast six feet to the right, and then with two more he drives her straight down toward the crest of the falls.

Honest, I never saw paddle work like it. I watched every move he made, and he was thinking faster than I could see. Then the bow shot out over the crest and the whole canoe left the water and landed in that boiling kettle below with a splash that hid everything from sight. I was wondering if he went clear under when he shoots out across the whirlpool, almost gets turned around and sunk a couple of times and then draws into shore, where he steps out and holds the canoe.

"You'd better take William Gordon, Billy," he says. "I'm too wet."

I lifts the baby out, and do you know he didn't have a drop of water on him. The blanket over him was a little wet with spray, but that was all.

Well, sir, I never saw anything like what happened then. Cassels and the missus and Natalie comes sliding and falling down that bank so fast they almost knocks me and Bruce and William Gordon back into the water. They're laughing and crying and talking and shrieking all at once, and while I won't be sure, I think Mrs. Cassels kisses Bruce square on the mouth. I know she kissed the baby seven million times and held it and sung to it and talked to it, and then all of a sudden she just sat down limp on a windfall and began to cry.

Natalie was crying, too, and she shakes hands with Bruce, looking at him through the tears.

"Most bright things are only brass," is all she says, and he stares at her, wondering if the fright made her crazy.

And then came the funniest part of the whole business. While every one was talking at once I happened to think of the man back at camp. You'd suppose I was tickled to death, wouldn't you? But that's the funny part of it. I wasn't. I was sorry for him. I don't think I was ever so sorry for a man before in my life.

Everybody started back, Natalie and Cassels and the missus hanging around Bruce like flies around a dog's ear, and all talking at once. And then the thought I'd had must have hit them all at the same time. Everybody got quiet and there wasn't a word as we walked into camp. You'd 'a' thought they was going to a funeral.

Delamere Magee wasn't in sight. His and Bruce's tent was closed, and we thought he was in there. Bruce stopped in front of it, and just then the flaps was opened and Magee steps out. He didn't look at any one except Bruce and he steps over to him and sticks out his hand.

"Bruce," he says, "I've known I was making this trip with a real man. Now I want to tell you so, if—" he stops a minute and then goes on quick—"if you care for my opinion."

"Forget it, old man," says Bruce quick and shoving Magee back. "Come on into the tent and get on some dry clothes. You're soaked."

Well, sir, you never know how decent folks are until they get a good chance to be. Magee had to come out to supper and everybody was nice to him, though each one was thinking the same thing and afraid lest some one'd say it. It's dark when we get through eating and then every one goes to bed, though I don't think there's one in the outfit who's sleepy.

After everything's quiet Bruce comes over to Frank's and my tent.

"What's the best way out, Billy?" he asks.

"Stick with us and you'll get out soon enough," I tells him.

"No. I want to start early in the morning, and I want to know the best route to the railroad," and he spreads out his map.

Digitized by Google

"I don't know anything about it," I tells him, all disgusted.

Bruce looks me straight in the eye for a minute. Then he says:

"I've got to, Billy. It would be cruel to do anything else, and he wants to go. I can't imagine worse torture than for him to stay around here now."

I was all ready to call him a dozen kinds of a silly fool when all of a sudden I sees what sort of a man Bruce is. He's so far ahead of the kind I'm used to seeing that I don't recognize him at once. But I'm a bull-headed fellow when my mind's set on a thing, and I don't tell him what I think. Instead, I gets up and goes out of the tent, leaving Bruce to talk to Frank.

Delamere Magee is awake, as I knew he would be, and he comes out when I whispers to him. A few minutes later he and I are in the canoe that Bruce shot the falls with and running down a little stretch of fast water, the last of the river, to Wild Potato Lake. It ain't more than a mile across to Grassy Narrows, and pretty soon I'm beating off Indian dogs with one hand and pounding on Bom-ee-gee-sick-wayb's teepee with the other.

"Bomie's a good Indian," I tells Magee, "and he'll have you to the railroad in time to catch the passenger for Port Arthur by tomorrow night."

I wait around until the Indian comes out. I'm not saying anything and neither is Magee. Bomie gets into his canoe and grunts, and Delamere goes over and gets into the bow. Honest, it made my heart ache to see him, so quiet and bent over and ready to go off alone in the dark with a strange Indian. I runs over and sticks out my hand.

"*Bo' jou'*, Delamere," I says, gripping him hard. "Good luck."

Do you know, he hangs on to my hand like a traveling preacher and I can hear him trying to swallow something so's he can speak.

"Good-by, Billy," he says, kind of choking.

I pulls away, and he says:

"Wait a moment. I don't know as you care to listen, but I want to say something."

"Get it off your chest," I tells him.

"I've known all my life that some day a situation like that of this evening would arise," he goes on, "and I knew with equal certainty how I would act. All my life I have lived in fear of such a thing, and I have always fought it. I see now that I fought it the wrong way. I knew in my heart what I was, but I wanted others to think differently. So I talked and told things with the hope that they would believe me and never guess the truth. Do you understand?"

"You're just upset," I tells him. "Ninety-nine out of a hundred men would lose their heads in a case like that. I would myself."

"Do you mean that, Billy?" he cries, grabbing my hand again.

"Sure," I says, pulling away quick. "I did once."

Which was the best lie I ever told. I suppose Magee was a decent sort of lad in town. Otherwise a fellow like Bruce never would have chummed up with him. And since that time I've not been so quick on judging a man by his pants.

CLEMENTINE and I finished that trip together. She had the bow and I had the stern, and we got to be almost chummy. Natalie, after Magee left, paddled with Bruce that last week. But that's just the luck a fellow has when he butts in. If he goes out of his way to do some one a good turn he loses out himself.

Still, Natalie was more friendly than ever with me and I didn't mind so much. And Christmas time I'd 'most forgotten all about it when Bruce comes up to see us and brings Mrs. Bruce with him.

We was sitting around the stove the first night, talking and laughing about that trip with Clementine.

"Every time I've thought of you, Billy," says Natalie, "I've remembered what an angel you were to put up with that horrid, disagreeable thing the way you did."

"Well, Clementine wasn't exactly the best sport I've ever guided," I tells her, "and there was times when nothing in the world would have given me more joy than to cut her throat. She cured me of ever thinking I can milk, but at the same time I've always had a soft spot in my heart for Clementine because she did something I was always trying to do and couldn't."

"What's that?" she asks, blushing a little, for that girl could always read me as easy as if I was a Dominion Day poster.

"Well, well," I says. "And you never guessed it. Maybe there was too much excitement for any one to think of it that night, but it was Clementine that chewed the canoe rope off, thinking it was her own."

Digitized by Google

FIFTY-FIFTY

by LELAND WARD PECK

TO BE scorched and seared by the pitiless sun and the blast-furnace breath of the north wind, blinded by the swirling red dust, and gagged by the warm, insipid water, was not enough adversity; Thorne Camp's already distressed existence was threatened by a new affliction. Old Huffy, the super, sensed it; the Chinks in the cook-house knew it; the men—they were in on it.

All day, every day, the sun poured its relentless heat over the camp with the intensity only the sun can have in a parched and treeless country. Because the Pacific Western decreed that rails should go through these desolate, naked hills, the contractors had shipped in material.

By the time the shacks and tents were up, ruthless Summer swept in, burning brown the hillsides, sucking up the last drop of moisture, and loosening the grade stakes along the right of way. Shadeless and almost waterless, the camp writhed and panted through the long days and tossed and muttered through the nights.

The wind had died away. Acrid coal smoke from the cook-house drifted down the sultry air. The slanted sun-rays, cloaking the bleak hills with a brazen glow, created long shadows in the jumble of makeshift buildings and tents in the hollow.

About the horse-troughs a group of dusty skinners dabbled under an inadequate dribble of water from a hose and uttered calumnious statements about rockmen, all and sundry. Black, crude soap and sleazy, waterproof towels from the commissary store served roughly the purpose for which they had been bought.

Iron Car Bill, his body bare above the waist turned angrily to one of the speakers.

"Don't let that big stiff get your goat," he snarled. "He'll get his soon enough, him an' his bunch o' badgers. I ain't through with that big red-head, I'm tellin' you. That skunk's too ornery to bunk in the same camp with my mule team."

This last statement represented Iron Car Bill's honest opinion of Jerry McLaren, the tunnel foreman. He had little love for any of the rockmen, but he nursed a particularly virulent grudge against Big Jerry. Along one side of his head he wore a scar, reminder of his last intimate exchange of courtesies with the red-haired miner. A well-directed blow from a tamping-bar in the hands of Big Jerry had dropped Bill from the list of battlers in that particular free-for-all fight between the skinners and the rockmen.

To some, the Siskiyou job where this memorable mêlée had taken place seemed in the dim distant past, but to Iron Car Bill Dove the three-year-old incident was as fresh as if it had taken place but a month before. In his breast smoldered a coal that could, with little fanning, burst into flame.

Not having labored in the heavy pall of red dust, the rockmen were less in need of water than the skinners; that is, on the score of appearances. It was their habit, therefore, to dip up their water from the horse-troughs and perform their limited ablutions behind the bunkhouse. So, while the skinners over by the corral were loosening the surface dirt and flushing it off with the hose, the day shift from the drift, bending over their tin basins, passed the soap and cutting remarks. Since noon they had had little opportunity to talk; now they were making up for lost time discussing

Digitized by Google

their troubles—in other words, the skinners.

Big Jerry took up his short black pipe from the bench and stood, rubbing the bristly red growth on his face, listening to his men deliver their tirades.

"A man's got to smell o' horse sweat or that gang o' coyotes class him with wops an' greasers," one was saying hotly. "Sittin' at that hunkey table makes me sore enough, but the cracks them —— skinners pass about us just plain riles me!"

"They ain't got far to go, believe me, before they run into trouble!" exclaimed a gnarled little miner.

"They's outnumber us," said a gray old dog seriously, "but the night shift'll make it near even. The lads is spoilin' for a scrap; they ain't much to bust the monoteeny for them boys a-workin' an' a-sleepin' vicey-vercy to us. Soon as them skinners start some——"

"They're jes' waitin' for a good chance," broke in another. "I know the breed."

Big Jerry spoke next.

"Yes, they're aimin' to start somethin'," he said in a low voice, "an' it's got to come."

He raised his hand for silence and went on:

"I'm for peaceful business, boys. You know me; I never backed down from anything yet. But a scrap won't get us anything but a lot o' broken heads, an' the Old Man'll blame us, not his pet skinners, whatever happens. Of course," he hastened to add, to forestall something he saw in the faces of his mates, "if it comes to it, we'll fight. But maybe I can settle this matter with the skinners without a mix-up. If it don't work, an' it comes to a showdown, then we'll walk into 'em like we did on the Siskiyou job. You boys willin' for me to try out my plan first?"

"You know us, Jerry," came several voices.

"Suits me."

"Go to it, Jerry."

"Just sit tight," counseled Jerry. "If they get noisy, let 'em rave. We won't stand for any rough stuff if they start it, but don't make any passes at 'em until I try my little scheme on Iron Car Bill. Countin' on that grudge o' his, I think we can settle for the whole camp—just us two." And folding his towel Big Jerry disappeared into the bunkhouse.

A hundred feet or so away, Iron Car Bill's head emerged through his plaid shirt.

"I got a hunch them pick artists is plannin' to horn in some more tonight at supper an' start somethin'," he said.

"An' we'll stand for it—not!" put in a tough young teamster. "Any time the word passes, bo, I'm ready."

"Me, too!" exclaimed several.

"Same here!"

"You said it!"

Only that day at noon Big Jerry had gone with two of his men to the skinners' table, and nothing had come of it. It was a tentative move on the part of the rockmen; at least they could find out how strong the feeling really was. Mumblings and half phrases were heard from the skinners, but resentment had not gone beyond that.

Sharkey, the Chinese cook, appeared in the cook-house door, his moon face a-glisten with warmth. Two Chinese flunkeys filled the last of the coffee-cups with their mysterious mixture, saw that the cans of milk were in place, and lit the oil lamps overhead. Sharkey now rotated his short iron poker in the triangle gong hung by the door. The rich, mellow tones carried through the hot dusk as no other call could, and the bunkhouse spewed forth its motley horde.

JOSTLING, good-naturedly jesting with their buddies, the men crowded into the hot, stuffy confines of the long eating-tent, where two tables stretched end to end. A five-foot passageway between their ends marked the line over which the rival factions contended. Muckers, wagon-swampers, all the common labor, and the rockmen, took seats at one table.

The skinners, with a sprinkling of carpenters, sub-foremen and the like, slid on to the benches of the other. At regular intervals along the oilcloth steamed platters and dishes of meat, potatoes and vegetables. Heads bent to plates immediately, earnestly, and mouths, busy with food, wasted no words. Crude, earthy men they were, many without outer shirts, none wearing coats.

First come, best fare. Most of the best portions of meat had been skilfully guided to individual plates before the rockmen were all seated. To be late to table here meant decided disadvantage. At the skinners' table, however, were more empty seats, and, even yet, a fairly complete selection of food.

Big Jerry, last to his place, looked about. To a man his mates rose. No word was

Digitized by Google

spoken. Noisily, but without haste, they bore down on the skinners' table, filling the empty places—many together, a few scattered—and began reaching for the platters.

Iron Car Bill turned to his neighbor.

"All the greasers'll be movin' in on us soon," he said sneeringly.

"Yeah," drawled the other, "a self-respectin' skinner ain't safe no more at his own table."

"It'll be Japs next," grunted a Fresno driver.

"Might as well be," mumbled the next man.

"Ain't they no way foreigners can be kep' out o' the country?" asked another.

"They's more'n one way o' headin' 'em off," suggested a heavy-browed teamster.

"Sometimes you gotta take a hand yourself," came from across the table.

"Good plan in this here case," added another voice.

"I been where we done more'n talk," growled a skinner farther down the table.

"You said somethin', bo," agreed a gruff voice; "me, too."

"No tellin' what'll happen right here in this camp," said Iron Car Bill, without looking up.

Silence fell in the eating-tent. From the sticky, heavy blackness beyond the cook-shack came snarling yaps of the coyotes down for their nightly feast at the refuse dump. The smoky oil lamps threw a dim, diffused light on the occupants of the tent, an uncomfortable crew with flushed, moist faces. A tense expectancy hovered over the long table. Quick, appraising looks were shot at the rockmen. What was their game, anyway?

For no interruption in eating on the part of the late comers had been noticed. Among the rockmen no glances were exchanged, yet every down-dropped eye gleamed. Logic ruled. Here was a meal to be consumed. Why waste good food? Big Jerry could do their talking for them; he was their leader. If it came to action—well, there was plenty of that on tap. So they ate steadily, stolidly, as was their custom.

Iron Car Bill mopped up his plate with a piece of bread and pushed the plate aside. Reaching for his dish of pudding, with its shiny blue-gray sauce, he started on another tack.

"A repeater is about due," he said, "an' my markers lay the same as at Siskiyou. We win then, an' it's due to come up again."

At this, Big Jerry, directly across the table from Iron Car Bill, straightened his back and looked keenly into that worthy's gray eyes. Ah! Big Jerry was going to say something at last. The spoons in the villainous pudding sauce fell silent. Expectancy showed in every face and in every attitude.

"Skinner," said Jerry in his softest voice, "your bet played that way stands to lose."

"Is that so!" snapped Bill sarcastically.

"You lose then, an' you'll lose again," Jerry went on.

"Wrong both times, miner; but wait until after the spin."

"Where were you after the last spin, skinner?" asked Jerry innocently.

The other flushed angrily.

"—— your last spin!" he grated between set teeth. "This is a new turn."

"I'm callin' the new turn now—you lose!"

"Wait an' see, miner; my bet goes as she lays."

"Skinner," said Jerry suddenly, "I heard somewhere that you had a rep for nerve—always ready to take a chance. I'm goin' to give you a chance to make good!"

"Want to spit at a crack for a thousand dollars?" sneered Bill.

"You'll need more nerve than that," answered Jerry calmly. "To sit in this little game takes more than words. Talk don't count—you'll need guts!"

"Some others doin' a lot o' talkin'," observed Bill, frowning.

"Not so much as was heard around here a while ago," remarked Big Jerry pleasantly. "From certain remarks I've heard, you skinners got a notion this table is yours, an' that rockmen ain't good enough to set at it." He spoke in easy, pleasant tones, singularly irritating to ears that wanted to hear harsh words, forcibly spoken. "This question's got to be settled," he continued. "You're thinkin' o' one way, I'm thinkin' another. My way'll settle it as well as yours—maybe better—if you're willin'—an' got the nerve. I ain't sure you got enough." And he looked at his enemy with partly closed eyes; his voice grated just a trifle.

"The —— I ain't!" cried Bill threateningly. "Don't you——"

"I'll show you," interrupted Jerry, as if speaking to a child. "If you're game," he added significantly.

Digitized by Google

"Play your ace." Bill bit off the words. "An' cut the talk."

"Right," said Big Jerry. "We'll see."

From his shirt bosom he produced a greasy, tan-colored paper cylinder about a foot in length and an inch in diameter.

"Dynamite!" exclaimed several voices. A buzz of words, low spoken, ran along the table.

"Looks like it, don't it?" observed Jerry, bringing from his pocket a short length of fuse and a box of caps.

"What's the big idear?" asked a skinner suddenly, looking from face to face. "What's comin' off?"

"Goin' to shoot open some o' Sharkey's bread," suggested Iron Car Bill grimly, his eyes on every move Big Jerry made.

The big rockman was fitting a cap to one end of the fuse.

"Anybody feelin' nervous," he said through teeth that were crimping the little detonator in place, "don't have to stay."

"See you outside," called a teamster jokingly, yet making good his intention of leaving.

Several others, torn between curiosity and doubt, followed to the tent door, where they stood watching, ready on the instant to complete their exit or return to fight.

A sneer was forming on Iron Car Bill's lips.

"Turned a red flag, eh?" he jeered. "Goin' to start us all up the Golden Ladder?"

"I'll tell you before I start anything," answered Jerry, opening his knife, "so's you can have a good start for the next camp."

Measuring, he cut from the stick of powder a section as long as his finger. Into the cut end of this piece he thrust the primed end of the fuse. Placing this in the center of the table, he turned a cup over it, straightening the free fuse along the table, a sort of dividing line between himself and Iron Car Bill. So interested was the latter in these operations that he neglected to retort to the slighting remark concerning a good start. The skinner was watching every motion the rockman made; first in scorn, then in interest, finally in fascination.

"Spittin' at a crack ain't in a class with this here little contest," said Jerry, placing a match beside his plate.

Iron Car Bill's face told frankly that he was puzzled. Their foreman's actions were equally puzzling to the rockmen.

"Spit it out, miner, what's your game?" jerked out Bill.

"If I light this fuse," explained Jerry, "it'll take about two minutes for the spark to get under the cup. While it's on its way there ain't nothin' to keep you or me from pullin' out the fuse. See? It's man to man, as the fella says, an' it calls for nerve. Me an' you, right here, can settle the whole business for the camp. My men are willin'; is it a go with you an' your gang?"

Now no one could truthfully say that Iron Car Bill Dove had ever hesitated at taking a chance. Among a daredevil class of men, he was the most reckless. His whole nature craved excitement; to risk his neck or his money on any venture was perhaps his greatest joy. His slogan might well have been: Try anything once!

Like many another, this young teamster throve on admiration. To lose or to weaken the position he held in the minds of the men of the open road and the camps would be the worst catastrophe that could overtake him. Was he game? Was it a go? Those were Big Jerry's words, and a reputation for nerve and daring hung in the balance. The skinners would judge him by his decision in this, he realized. No matter how disproportionate or how foolhardy the affair might be, to back down now meant the loss of that which stood for more to him than anything else — his standing among the men of his world.

His eyes now closed to narrow slits. He regarded Big Jerry steadily, seeking to read what lay behind that impassive face. Was it a bluff, or was the big miner crazy? How far would he carry this wild scheme if the fuse was not snatched out by the skinner?

These thoughts rapidly shaped themselves in Bill's brain. Then his mind snapped back to the question of what his mates would think, how they would expect him to act. This was the real factor. Well, Big Jerry had asked him if the fuse should be lighted, had put it straight up to him. There was really only one answer, according to his code, and he gave it.

"It's a go, miner," he said easily, with a careless gesture. "The sky's my limit, an' I'd just as soon go the limit now as any time. Hold the light, miner, when you're done with it. You don't mind my smokin' durin' our little party?" He busied himself with materials for a cigarette.

Digitized by Google

"Mm-m thanks," he added overpolitely, a moment later as he lighted his cigarette with the stub of Big Jerry's match.

THE fuse, spitting and fussing, sending off a spiral of smoke, now held the attention of every man in the eating-tent. Two inches were consumed before the silence was broken.

"She can't be pinched out," said Jerry. "The only way to stop 'er now is to yank 'er out." He began filling his pipe.

"Bill, what color wings do you want?" said Iron Car Bill in monologue. "Well, Pete, I guess any color'll do so long as it's red. All out o' red? Gave the last set to a red-head miner? Well, if it's all the same to you, Pete, I'd rather have green anyway, to match my harp."

He flicked the ash from his cigarette over his shoulder, his eyes not leaving the living, moving fire. Once he raised his glance to Jerry's face, but as if irresistibly drawn, returned it instantly to the dramatic little setting on the table. He shifted his feet, he moved his body, but to take his eyes off the fuse seemed impossible. Slowly his confident smile faded from his lips. He forgot to pose. His forehead became unduly moist; his mouth took on a strained expression.

Big Jerry, intent upon getting his pipe nicely packed, had not so much as glanced at the fuse. He now lighted his pipe and puffed deeply, calmly. The match-stub, still glowing, dropped to the table before him.

Like a flash Iron Car Bill's look shifted from the creeping spark to the live match-end. His first panic subsided; the remaining portion of the dynamite stick had not been touched by the spark. He did not know if a spark would set it off, but he felt decidedly easier as he saw the glow die out of the blackened match.

He continued to look intently at the cloth in front of Jerry, as if he had forgotten the spitting fuse. Gradually the ashy mask of fear slipped from his face, the tight-drawn lines relaxed. Suddenly he reached across the table and picked up the remainder of the stick of dynamite. Jerry's startled eyes were on his now. Raising one edge of the overturned cup, he thrust an end of the paper cartridge under it.

"Jes' as well have a big time as a little one while we're at it," he remarked, seeming completely at ease, his teeth showing in a quizzical smile.

Calmly he raised his eyes to Big Jerry's face and found an expression there that had not been there before. Jerry's eyes were wide, staring, as if the powder-stick, the fuse, and the cocked cup both fascinated and terrified him. Sweat drops had already begun forming on his contracted brow, and merging ran slowly into his fiery whiskers.

The fuse was half consumed.

What Iron Car Bill saw in his opponent's face acted as a stimulant on him. He became active. He blew a cloud of smoke to one side, hunched himself closer to the table and laughed derisively, gloatingly. His confidence grew as he saw the other's waver.

"Nice little bonfire we'll have, eh, miner?" he jeered.

Jerry drew his hand across his forehead. He seemed to be debating something.

"There ain't no need to use all that," he said, finally. His tone was low and steady, but there was no mistaking the stress he was under. The other's harsh laugh broke in immediately.

"You still got time to yank the fuse, miner," taunted the skinner, "or let 'er rip!"

The moving fire was within a few inches of the edge of the cup.

Jerry now looked searchingly into the mocking eyes across the table. An inch of fuse turned to ash during that exchange. Then, still holding the other's eyes, Jerry remarked steadily—

"Yank 'er yourself, skinner—or let 'er rip!"

In an instant a change came over Iron Car Bill. The blood drained out of his face. His lips relaxed from a grin to lines that spoke of fear. Involuntarily he swore wickedly under his breath. He had overplayed.

Intent wholly upon their contest, neither man had noticed that they were alone in the tent. The teamster's addition of the remainder of the powder-stick to the charge had sent the last lingerers hastily into the open air. One look was enough for the Chinamen; they had fled chattering into the dark.

Hunched over the table, the sputtering, swift-burning fuse growing short between them, the opponents presented a strange sight.

Unnaturally pale and set, their faces were wet with perspiration. The sullen

Digitized by Google

heat of the tent had some hand in this, but the mental strain had more. Iron Car Bill's hollow eyes followed the inexorable progress of the fire; Big Jerry's intense look was directed at the fateful stick of explosive. Terror tugged at both their wills; the still, hot atmosphere was charged with expectancy.

But one inch of the fuse remained in sight.

Iron Car Bill straightened up suddenly. At the same instant Big Jerry's mouth opened, but he held back the words, subconsciously judging exactly the time the spark would require to reach the cap. In the strain of this climax, a strong characteristic of the skinner asserted itself. Bill looked quickly about before speaking. The empty tent hastened and strengthened his decision.

As if the words were caught in his throat, he stammered:

"Aw right, we won't use it all," and he reached for the exposed stick with considerable haste.

Not so quick was he, however, as was Big Jerry. Their hands touched over the object of their haste. Jerry's came away with the powder; he placed it gently, almost reverently, on the ground behind him. Relief showed plainly in his face, and Iron Car Bill loosed a breath that spoke of a weight removed from his chest. For what seemed a long time their gazes met. Between the two enemies passed a look of understanding.

Unnoticed, unheeded, the relentless fire ate its way to the lip of the cup. Instantly it had slipped within; its smoke was now shut from sight. The two rivals, however, eye to eye, unmoved, took no heed.

Silence for a breath—then came a muffled explosion like a small rifle-shot. The enameled cup moved slightly. A bit of smoke rose slowly. A few dark streaks on the oilcloth showed the extent of the damage. Neither man had stirred.

"Skinner," said Big Jerry earnestly, "you showed guts!"

"You, too, miner," answered Iron Car Bill; "I gotta hand it to you."

"Didn't think you'd stick it out," Jerry went on. "You sure had me goin' for a while."

"That was a bluff o' mine, puttin' in the other end; thought you'd snake it out *muy pronto*."

"Bluff o' mine, too, in the first place," said Jerry.

"Sure it was," grinned the skinner; "I happen to know fire-clay when I see it." He pointed to the oilcloth. "You spilled some when you cut the piece off, but I wouldn't 'a' noticed it if you hadn't dropped that match an' made me look right at it." His voice dropped. "Call it quits, Jerry—fifty-fifty. What d'you say?"

"There ain't only one answer to that, Bill," answered Jerry, showing his teeth in an expansive grin as he stuffed the clay-filled part of the cartridge into his shirt and brushed the tell-tale yellow crums from the table. "Sure! Jes' say it failed to explode."

They stood facing each other across the table. The match which lighted Bill's dead cigarette served to fire Bill's pipe. The skinner saw his position more firmly fixed than ever; the rockman saw the difficulties in Thorne Camp fade. Bill breathed smoke deeply and watched the thin blue stream come forth.

"I got you! It failed to explode," he said, meeting grin with grin.

Big Jerry cocked his ear to footsteps outside.

"Say," he chuckled in a low voice, "supposin' I'd cut off the wrong end!"

Digitized by Google

THE MAN WHO BUILT UP FROM THE ACE

by HENRY MARTEL GWYNN

ALLINGHAM shoved a persistent fly off the camagon table, then built the two on the ace. He watched intently as he turned the next card, but it was a king and he couldn't use it.

He turned one, and then one, and one. The hot sickly breath of the jungle made the cards sticky, and most of their edges and some of their spots were worn off, but they were valuable at that, and to Taal considerably interesting.

Taal was a very small native town in the Philippines, which means that there were about fifteen houses that covered up a hundred families and myriads of animals that slept in the open part beneath, their presence known to those above by the distinctive odors that ascended. In this way Taal kept a strict account of its pigs, chickens and carabaos.

The houses stood on four long stilts, with one big room above that was a cohabitation of many persons and things. What Taal didn't need was dropped through a hole in the bamboo floor, hence the faithful presence of those below.

By day, Taal sat indolently on its ladder-like steps or gazed curiously out of unglassed windows; at night, bamboo shutters were tightly drawn, doors fastened, and here and there through kinks in the walls came the fitful flare of holy lights. On the floor, beneath huge brass crucifixes, lay blanketed brown figures—and so Taal slept.

In the shelter of these signs and symbols of religion the phlegmatic carabao wandered off, or the pig leaving only drops of his blood departed, or the thin-bladed bolo found its way up through the bamboo floor to some soft body above. This was Taal, indolent, inscrutable, a thief. White men called her a *ladrone* and meant anything or nothing; but to Taal there was no uncertainty; she knew the white man, she had experienced two and she knew she had only to wait and he would turn blacker than she.

The first had been sent out by an English sugar company. This was many years before there was intervenous injection of serum, and you died in a knot or on the breast of your squaw. Wilkins came first, a rotter at home, with weak shifting eyes and a blubbery mouth. Taal relishes the anecdote now, but I hope for the sake of Wilkins' soul that a good bit of the tale was born in the passing from one brown mind to another.

The next was Atkins. He came much later, but not in our day at that. He seemed to have tried, but the girl preferred Juan Atkins for the child, instead of plain Juan; so Atkins stood up before a white-surpliced native priest and was married—a good deal of Atkins' life seemed to have been unnecessary. They say that for a moment during the ceremony he suddenly straightened, then wilted and said: "Oh ——! What's the use!"

Taal spoke no English then, so she handed this down, too, thinking it a sort of benediction that Atkins had pronounced. He was not known to have said a great deal after that and little more is known of him.

NOW it was Allingham who taught Taal out of English primers from nine until two, and from two until ten tried to forget Taal by building up from the ace. Allingham was of our day and a

Digitized by Google

teacher in this town built upon stilts because of such words as, brown brother, equality and independence.

He looked out at the fields of miry rice paddies, and the wallowing carabao with the naked child that followed behind guiding the horned beast. He thought of the little snake, like a minnow, that lived in that slime, and when it bit you you died; and that is why women and children followed in the cloven tracks. There was no yelling at the beast; no calling the time of day; only the flop of the mud and slime.

Two years he had watched the sun drop like a plummet behind the horizon; and as the drawing of a shade it was night, bearing in its shadows silence and the calls of the flesh. Then it was shuffle and seven cards in a row with her picture looking mutely down.

She sat there every night, her curls falling about her face, her eyes gazing into his. When the candle had burned low, he would lean over and whisper to her; with the dying of the taper, he bent forward and kissed her—and another night was passed.

Two years and another, but now the man was afraid. He had heard the love murmurings grow into pleas for strength, and still one year to do until the fight was finished and he could go back.

She that was real didn't know and only partly guessed, for when she asked he replied irrelevantly that his health was very good, or that his work was satisfactory to the Department; reserving most of the ten pages for carefully edited accounts of *fiestas*, *bailes* and the antics of twelve little rice bellies that daily insulted the verb "to be."

But a night came when the cards lay untouched, when she that was a picture looked down upon hastily scrawled words to her that was real. The man was telling and he told it all, of Atkins and he who had gone before, of Taal smiling cynically and waiting; of the things that had helped, of her picture, but most of all of the seven rows with the ace and twos and threes that followed; and at the end he asked for help to bear him on.

Months passed, the rains came, and with them the cholera. Allingham wrote to the Department asking that a doctor be sent out immediately. They wrote back requesting additional information, such as the number of deaths a day, etc.

In the light of a softening tallow candle Allingham stared out into the night as big black-legged men, bearing white shrouded burdens went silently by; and the Department's letter lay in a crumpled wad in the corner. From houses that looked like giant toad-stools came the plea, the pain, the cry of death; and through the holes in the big rooms a good deal of the answer to the Department's letter.

Allingham walked over to the table, picked up the deck of cards, and hurled them through the window. Taking her picture from the table he placed it in the bottom of his trunk and carefully locked the lid.

The candle burned slowly down. The tiny taper fluttered, sparkled and went out. The patter of bare feet ceased. A streak of light appeared in the east, a cock crowed, it was day.

Allingham got up from the chair, stretching his cramped limbs. He paced nervously back and forth until it was time for school, then picked up his books and went out.

To these black-eyed pupils, that were children in one country and marriageable women in this, the spoken word was not needed. Reading of signs was the heritage of centuries.

And now, as the white hand was left too long on their shoulders, or the white face held too close to theirs, they read, smiled back and calculated. *El señor maestro* received three hundred pesos a month—a fortune in itself. A house, that would cost one hundred pesos; furnishings, maybe fifty pesos—they would do it extravagantly; a carabao one hundred and fifty, expensive, but then he would do all the work; a few pigs and chickens and dogs that bark at night, but dogs were free. All this and a white man to boot!

Whom would he choose? *Quien sabe?* But one of them of a surety. *Carambal* In the passing of a night it was done. *El señor maestro* had decided to be human. Bah! what did he think that he could go on forever without a woman, when even Padre Lopez had one? What a tale it would be for the watchers on the ladder-like steps. And when the bell rang for the closing of the session they clamored out, brown bearers of brown tales.

The man walked slowly back to his house. On the table was a small oblong package. It was post-marked the United States and the handwriting was hers. He opened it

Digitized by Google

and there was a deck of cards. Within was written:

For a new year and a new faith. When you play now, I play, too; if you falter, I falter, too. Come, let us begin the game.

When the night shadows deepened, the light of a candle shone on seven rows, while she that was a picture looked down while the two was builded on the ace.

Taal waiting impatiently outside, finally went home and confided to some of its offsprings that they were fools.

THE MAN-BREAKER by HADSBURG LIEBE

Author of "The Patch," "The Law in Little Egypt," etc.

HE WAS a native-born Tennessee mountaineer, this Bill Harkrader; and yet he was tangled. These particular mountains had puzzled him for hours. The truth of the matter was that he had crossed the State line into North Carolina without being aware of that fact.

When night came on, he traveled in the bed of a shallow creek, the noises he made by stumbling over the rough stones, notwithstanding, because he would have soon become hopelessly lost in the dense, blooming laurels; the interlacing branches of the trees overhead shut out even the pale light of the stars. By keeping to the creek, he knew, he would be going largely in one direction; he figured that the blue-coated man who had pursued him so relentlessly for a day and a night wouldn't know enough to take to the water. Now and then he paused to listen, however, to make sure.

There was a flaw in his reckoning. The law's long arm was within a hundred feet of him; it stopped splashing when he stopped, and went on when he went on. The officer had a revolver, but he had no cartridges for it; he had fired all his cartridges at Bill Harkrader, and without doing the slightest damage. Bill Harkrader was unarmed.

After an hour of stumbling along in the stony bed of little Nobody's Creek, the Tennessean halted abruptly at an opening in the virgin forest. In the upward-slanting clearing before him he saw the outlines of two great rough-board houses of two stories, one of which was lighted dimly. The latter-named was a boarding-house for lumberjacks; the other held a logging company's commissary and machinery supplies, and the office and quarters of the superintendent.

Also there loomed up not far away the black hulks of a geared locomotive, a skidder, and a log-loader. Harkrader had spent seven of his twenty-four years in mountain logging-camps. Therefore this seemed a good deal like home to him.

He stood there at the lower edge of the clearing, which lay near the head of a broad valley, a minute too long. The blue-coated man, his eyes hard and determined in the darkness, stole up behind the fugitive, seized his arms and tried to slip irons on his wrists. Harkrader was big and stalwart, almost a giant, and he was as tough as knots of wire cable for all his great weariness. He threw the officer aside as a bear would have thrown aside a cur, broke and ran as rapidly as his sore legs would carry him.

Digitized by Google

The officer, himself half dead from exhaustion, rose and followed uncertainly.

Suddenly the mountaineer stopped before an open window in a wall of rough boards. He turned his eyes upward and saw the building that, he knew, held the logging company's commissary. Then he heard his pursuer coming, panting heavily, dogged, determined not to give up until he had caught his man.

Bill Harkrader clambered quickly and silently through the open window. The officer, muttering under his breath, ran on.

Harkrader began to grope in the darkness, and soon his hands came in contact with a big roll-top desk like the one in the super's office over at the Long-Hardy Company's camp. He could not hope to hide there for long: the super might come in at any moment.

Harkrader groped on until he came to a steep stairway in a corner, and this he climbed. Once in the little room over the office, he threw himself to the floor and stretched himself out to rest. He was hungry, hungrier than he had ever been before, and close by, certainly, was food; but first he had to rest. For more than twenty-four hours Bill Harkrader had been hounded like a fox.

Fifteen minutes went silently by, and then there came to the fugitive's quick ears the sound of a little clock somewhere near striking the hour of nine. A moment later there was the click of a door-latch, and heavy footsteps rang on the floor below; a match was scratched, and an oil-lamp was lighted.

With his heart in his throat, the Tennessean peered down between two of the upstairs room's floor-boards. But it was not his pursuer, and he drew a long breath of relief.

The man below was a huge man, and he wore a young and silky brown beard, trimmed nicely to a point. His eyes were keen and gray and as hard as flint. He was dressed exactly as Bill Harkrader was dressed: high-laced boots, brown corduroys, a blue shirt, a narrow black tie, and a broad-rimmed black hat. Bill Harkrader hated him at first sight, instinctively, because he recognized in him an enemy. And that was a thing that Bill Harkrader never forgot: when first he saw Bernhard Lisk, he hated him. Now this big mountaineer was neither mean, vicious, nor quarrelsome. Remember that.

BERNHARD LISK dropped into a scarred swivel-chair before his roll-top desk, flung his hat to the floor, and called gruffly.

"Well, come in, why don't you, Old Nick? Don't stand there gawping like a baby buzzard! You know you're welcome, don't you?"

A lanky, bearded, poorly dressed old man stepped in out of the night and stood grinning foolishly at the big fellow in the swivel-chair. This old man was a mountaineer, it was plain, and his flushed face and watery eyes told Bill Harkrader that he had been drinking more than was good for anybody.

"Sit down," Lisk ordered with brutal impatience, and with one foot he sent a cheap straightback spinning over the floor.

The old mountaineer sat down, still grinning foolishly, and crossed his long, thin legs. The other produced a short, flat, coffin-shaped bottle of water-clear fluid from a desk drawer, and each drank from it—and it was so strong that they made grimaces and kept swallowing and swallowing after it was down. Old Nick turned his flushed face toward the open doorway.

"Come, Fido!" he sang out. "Hyuh! Hyuh! Good ole dawg Fido!"

A dog entered the little office-room, and such a dog, in color at least, Bill Harkrader had never seen before. It was a bright yellow, a vivid yellow, a yellow so yellow that it shone like burnished gold in the lamplight; it was of the size of a common hound, and it had ears like those of a common hound, the kind that is prone to steal eggs.

The man at the desk pointed toward the dog and shook with coarse, jarring laughter.

"Who'd you sell it to last, Old Nick?" he asked.

"E'bert Yancey," answered Old Nick thickly. "'At colorin' was made by b'ilin' the bark o' hick'ry roots in rainwater. Hain't he yaller! He-he!"

"And tomorrow you'll dye it brown and sell it to somebody else; and when it comes back home you'll dye it black and sell it all over again!" laughed Bernhard Lisk. "Tell me this, Old Nick: just how many times have you sold that one dog, you old rascal?"

"'Bout forty times, I reckon," and Old Nick grinned foolishly. "Yaller sells the best. I can make a lot o' shades and spots wi' the bark offen hick'ry roots, and blood root, and red-oak bark, and shoe-blackin'.

Digitized by Google

But say, Bern, you ain't a tellin' nothin'."

"I am not," emphatically declared Lisk. "Take another drink, Nicholas. You made it yourself, you know, so you needn't be afraid of it."

"Yes, I made it myself," Old Nick agreed proudly, "an' it's pyore as the mornin' jew. I am a' hawnest man, Bern, ef I *am* as pore as Job's turkey, which same had to stand in one place four hours afore the sun would drap it a shadder. I am a' hawnest man, Bern."

Again, and yet again, he helped himself to the fiery contents of the short, broad, coffin-shaped bottle, and soon he was ready to be put to bed, lugged home, or left to the mercies of the woods. Bill Harkrader, lying with his eyes glued to the crack, frowned heavily with disapproval. He knew how it went; he had seen other men fall to their damnation over that same thing.

Then he saw Bernhard Lisk go to his feet, take a black-leather pocketbook from a pigeonhole, look in it carefully, close it and thrust it adroitly into the old man's inside coat pocket. Bill Harkrader's scratched and bleeding hands clenched angrily at the sight of that. The man Lisk was pulling off some crooked, cowardly deal on the old mountaineer. But Harkrader kept quiet; he was in no position to offer help to the weaker party at that moment.

Just as Lisk sat down in his swivel-chair again, the door swung wide with a bang, and there entered the little office a barefooted young woman in faded but freshly laundered calico, with sunny-brown hair and chestnut-brown eyes, a young woman whose face was chalky white with anger and quite remarkable for its fine, wild beauty. She moved with the sure, mature grace of a doe, and her lithe figure showed its perfect lines even in the poor dress.

For a few seconds she stood and looked down upon the old man with contempt; then pity took the place of contempt; then a great love took the place of pity, and she spoke.

"Father?" she murmured. It was a question, an eternal and unanswered question.

Harkrader wondered much. The ordinary hillwoman would have called her father "Pap."

Old Nick Maden wiggled uncertainly in his chair and looked up with his watery eyes.

"It's you—I'm durned ef it ain't you, Jen! You go straight home now, Jen!" he cried out drunkenly.

"All right," replied his daughter. "In a minute I'll go home, and you'll go with me."

She faced Bernhard Lisk, who was smiling queerly, not in the least guiltily. With one forefinger she pointed to the half-empty bottle on the desk.

"Bern," she rebuked, "you did it—this time. He had no whisky of his own, I know, for he sold it all. Why do you encourage—encourage him in doing like this? Do you think I'd marry a man who is such an enemy of him—my poor old excuse for a father? But," going even whiter, despair and heartbreak in her musical voice, "it's no use. Help me get him up, Bernhard. Help me get started home with him, will you?"

"Sure, Jen," and Lisk rose and caught the old hillman under the arms. "But I didn't give him any whisky, Jen, honest. That is his own bottle."

Bernhard Lisk shrugged his shoulders like a Latin and began to lift Old Nick.

"Here, Nicholas," gruffly, "get up and go along home with your daughter!"

"I'll paint him brown and put some black spots on him," muttered old Maden.

He went, staggering, with his daughter out into the peaceful mountain night. The brilliantly yellow hound followed them proudly, as if it were aware of the rare good service it had rendered its master by promptly returning home as soon as the leash was off, to be dyed again.

When the door had closed behind them, there came to Harkrader the sound of the old man coughing, and the sound of a woman's choking sob, and the low and sympathetic whine of a dog. Bernhard Lisk laughed to himself, yawned, took up the oil-lamp, and—moved toward the stairway!

Harkrader caught his breath. Lisk was going to bed, and his bed was in the up-stairs. All the other supers had slept in their offices. Why hadn't he noticed that there was no bed below? Unless he hid himself quickly, Lisk would find him, and he knew that there was no shred of mercy in the heart of that great brute of a man.

He rose, and almost fell over a soap-box. The lamp and the huge brown head of Lisk appeared above the level of the up-stairs floor. Weary as he was, Harkrader prepared himself for a battle.

Digitized by Google

"What are you doing snooping around up here?" demanded Lisk, and Harkrader saw that he had a revolver ready in one hand.

The Tennessean stood still and stared. He was not foolish enough to spring against a loaded, leveled revolver. But he wasn't afraid. He was only careful.

"You needn't bother to keep me covered," he said finally, speaking briskly; his years of association with Yankee woods foremen and Yankee superintendents had taken away all his native drawl and otherwise greatly improved his speech. "I didn't come here for any harm to you. Take my word for it."

Lisk smiled a cold smile and came on. He put the lamp down on a crude table, sat himself down on a cheap iron bed, and pointed to the soap-box that Harkrader had almost fallen over.

"Rest yourself, Bill," he invited; "you need it."

Wondering, Harkrader sat down.

"You know my name, I see."

"Of course," readily. "You're from the Long-Hardy camp, fifty miles to the west of here. I saw the officer who chased you over, just before I came in. He's hanging out at the boarding-house until morning, when he's going back to Tennessee. Devil of a race you fellows had! He told me to keep an eye out for you, Harkrader."

Harkrader said nothing. Lisk took from a rear trousers-pocket a pair of handcuffs and tossed them to the floor at the Tennessean's feet.

"Just put those on, will you?" with that cold smile of his.

Then he turned the left lapel of his brown corduroy coat and showed Bill Harkrader a shining deputy-sheriff's badge. While trying to get away from the long arm of the law, Bill Harkrader had taken refuge in the rooms of an officer.

II

"YOU see," went on Lisk, "we have trouble here now and then, and the company had me appointed a deputy-sheriff in defense of itself. The irons, Harkrader."

The revolver threatened. Harkrader bent over and picked up the handcuffs, but he did not put them on. His gaze sought the flinty gray eyes of his captor, and he muttered angrily.

"It's a fine officer of the law that makes an old man drunk and then lies to his daughter about it; that encourages the gentle art of moonshining, and, among other things, slips empty pocketbooks into old men's pockets. I'll bet you my right arm you're not anxious to have your doings here investigated, Mr. Deputy-Sheriff Superintendent!"

Bernhard Lisk, for one second, looked like a man who had received a blow in the face, and the Tennessean noted it.

"What did you do over at the Long-Hardy camps?" asked Lisk, as if for want of something else to say.

Harkrader knew that the bluecoat had told Lisk what he had done. However, he gave his little story:

"I was a cutter at Long-Hardy," he began, "and I was a big worker. When one of the woods foremen, a fellow named McDonald, got to soldiering on the job, they gave me his place and sent him to a 'wayout bunch. My father worked in this 'wayout bunch. McDonald, for spite, picked a quarrel with my father, and whipped him—an old man like that! One of my friends came and told me, and I went after McDonald. I found him, and I beat him with these fists—" he held them forward, great, trembling brown knots of bone and sinew—"until the doctor barely found breath in him. I was hiding out, waiting to see whether McDonald lived or died, and not caring very much which way it went, when an officer came to arrest me for the crime of 'Assault and battery with attempt to kill.' McDonald's brother brought the officer. I ran, and he followed me like a beagle. That's all."

"What was this McDonald's first name?"

"Duggar."

"You don't get any irons from me, Harkrader!" exclaimed Bernhard Lisk, rising. "I know Duggar McDonald, the old sour-mash, and I hate him worse than the devil. You're hungry, aren't you? Wait."

He pocketed his revolver, gave the fugitive a smile that seemed full of genuine warmth, took up the lamp and hastened downstairs. When he came back, he gave Harkrader crackers, corned beef, and canned peaches. The hungry Tennessean fell to willingly.

"You'll be entirely safe here," Lisk said smoothly, "after a week. You can stay hidden for a week. I'll be the only officer

Digitized by Google

within a good many miles of here when that gink from Tennessee goes back in the morning. If you'll stay by me, I'll stay by you. But if you make the least attempt to give me a raw deal, Harkrader, I—I'll break you."

Harkrader looked up suddenly and narrowly.

"Brother," he smiled, "I'm a hard man to break! But—forget it. I won't give you any raw deal."

"I don't care how hard you are to break, I'll break you if you make the least attempt to give me a raw deal," growled Bernhard Lisk.

A little later, Bill Harkrader rolled himself in a blanket on the floor and slept like a boulder. Not until the July sun peeped over the crest of the eastern mountain did he stir. Lisk gave him more food from the commissary, brought a pail of water for him, told him to lie close, and went off up the narrow-gage track on a sputtering little locomotive.

The hours dragged to Bill Harkrader. From the up-stairs windows he had a fair view of the surrounding country, and he longed to get out, being essentially a man of the open. When noontime was past, and Lisk had gone off again, Harkrader stole down-stairs and to the near-by woods and set out at a brisk walk in an endeavor to rid himself of his soreness.

He came upon Jen Maden there in the thick forest, there in that sea of waxen-white laurel bloom and golden-yellow wild honeysuckles. He had been walking softly, as he always walked, and she did not see him at first.

She was not gathering flowers; she was on a mission far more prosaic than gathering flowers. At her bare feet a little pile of brushwood broken in stove lengths told a pitiful story of poverty and toil.

Harkrader's heart melted for her; he wished that it lay in his power to help her. Then her quick brown eyes caught sight of him, and she straightened and stared at him half defiantly. It was as if he were an intruder upon that holy of holies, a good woman's sorrow.

Bill Harkrader removed his broad-rimmed black hat and went up to her. The smile that was on his strong, smooth young face was good to see, and Jen's half-defiant manner vanished.

"How are you, Jen?" he said in a very friendly manner.

She smiled faintly. A thought occurred to him. He believed that he could trust her—he knew that he could trust her.

"Jen," he went on in a low tone, "we're both in big trouble. You and me. I wonder if we couldn't help each other? Anyway, let's try. Promise me that you'll never breathe it to a soul on earth, and I'll tell you all about myself. Will you, Jen?"

The almost homeless girl, crushed as she was beneath forces that to her were Titanic, starving as she was for the love and the care and the tenderness that is so dear to the heart of every true woman, promised eagerly. Bill Harkrader, Tennessean, fugitive from that which men called justice, told her his story briefly, omitting details toward the last.

And she told him her story. She was frank, embellishing nothing, apologizing for nothing.

Her father had followed logging-camps since her mother's death, since she could remember. Through the kindness of the wives of various superintendents, she had been partly educated. When her father had grown too old to do hard work with the other men, he had taken to moonshining as a means of gaining a livelihood, and at last the fiery product of his hidden still had overcome him.

A man who played with fire, she said bitterly, must sometime be burned. It was a law. Old Nick Maden had been burned; his very soul was charred. Bernhard Lisk—in her own language I give it to you:

"He is a man-breaker," she told Harkrader in an awed voice and with a frightened glance behind her. "His men call him that. He calls himself that. 'I am a Man-Breaker,' he will say to you. And he is. He has something on every man that works for him; half his men are criminals and wanted badly by the law. I don't know how he gets them, but he gets them; and, being himself deputized to represent the law, he protects them! Does it pay him for the risk? Bill Harkrader, every man that works for him gives him back a percentage of his wages each pay-day. If you work for him, you'll do that, too. The risk isn't so great, away out here forty miles from anywhere. You couldn't tell on him without telling on yourself, you know. Not many of his men have the slightest desire to tell: they are glad to have his protection; for he really does protect them.

Digitized by Google

"And there's father," she ran on brokenheartedly. "He holds a sword over father, too. But I don't know what it is. Father makes whisky and sells it to the men, and Bernhard Lisk gets half the money; it takes most of the other half to pay for the corn the whisky is made of. Bernhard is trying to drive me to marrying him for our own preservation, and God only knows, Bill Harkrader, what I'm going to do about it! I don't love anybody else, but I don't want to marry Bernhard. I imagine he wouldn't mistreat me, but—I don't want to marry him, of course. You'd better go now. I'll meet you here some other time, and we'll see if there's anything to be done. Good-by!"

She took up her brushwood and went. Bill Harkrader, before he went back to the room over the superintendent's little office broke half a wagonload of stovewood over his knee. And as he worked, he muttered to himself:

"A wonderful bluff! And if Duggar McDonald doesn't die, I'll call his bluff!"

But if Duggar McDonald died——

He spent the rest of that day in thinking about Jen and the hard life that had been her lot. That evening Lisk again brought food to him, and again cautioned him to lie close. Lisk's manner had grown decidedly friendly, but Bill Harkrader was not deceived.

AS SOON as Lisk had gone to his work the next morning, Harkrader went to the woods. But he saw nothing of Jen. For four days he watched and watched for Jen, and not once did he see either her or her father. He feared that some untoward thing had happened, and he was uneasy

Came another afternoon, and he found their old and dilapidated, rambling log-cabin; it was hidden among giant hemlocks. He knew it by a faded calico dress that hung out at a window to dry—Jen had but two dresses, and one of them was drying most of the time. Harkrader swore softly at himself; he had thought that the Madens lived in one of the little, rough-board houses in the clearing.

He walked soundlessly up to the open doorway and looked in. Old Nick, his lanky throat swathed in turpentine-soaked red-flannel rags, was on his knees in the center of the floor; he was busily engaged in changing the color of his hound from a bright yellow to a rich brown by means of the ooze of red-oak bark. He turned his grizzled head and saw Harkrader.

"Hi, neighbor," he grunted, coughing. "Howdy. Come in. I been laid up for four mortal days 'ith the brownkeetus. I been nigh dead, neighbor. I jest a minute ago got out o' my sickbed. Jen she was tickled when I got up. Jen she's a mortal good gyurl. Ay Jen!"

Harkrader knew now why the girl had not come to meet him. Jen came from the other room.

"Bring this here feller a chair," ordered her father, coughing again.

"I can't stop, thanks," said the Tennessean; he motioned to the girl to follow him and went off into the woods.

The girl followed him. They had a long walk, and a long talk, and—each fell much in love with the other. Harkrader accompanied Jen back to the cabin, and there they found Bernhard Lisk, apparently very angry, standing with his back to the door and swearing at Old Nick. Old Nick, fear written deeply in his lined countenance, cowered on the hearth.

"Stay back!" whispered Jen.

Lisk had not seen them. She entered, and Harkrader stole around a corner of the log house to listen unobserved.

"I've given you several days now, to make it good," Lisk was saying, "and you haven't made it good yet. Here's the pocketbook; where's the money? What did you do with the money?"

To Harkrader's ears came the voice of Old Nick's daughter, and it was surprisingly soft.

"I found the pocketbook in father's inside coat-pocket, but there was no money in it, Bern."

Harkrader understood. He pressed closer to the log wall, that he might not miss hearing a single word.

"There was money in it when he carried it off!" snapped Lisk. "More than two hundred dollars in it. Well, Jen, have you decided yet whether you will marry me?"

The surprisingly soft voice came again:

"Please step outside for a moment, Bern. I want to have a few words with father before I answer you."

Lisk went out and stopped at a point some twenty yards from the house. Harkrader, flattened against the log wall, hardly

Digitized by Google

permitted himself to breathe; he was barely out of the superintendent's sight.

"The time has come for you to tell me the truth, father," Jen was saying in a tone so low that Harkrader heard with difficulty. "What is it that Bernhard knows against you? And did you, or did you not, take that pocketbook from his desk?"

"Ef I took the pocketbook, I don't rickollect it, Jen," answered the old man. "I hope I may die right here ef I do."

"Are you sure?"

"Shore!" readily. "Tell me, Jen: do you want to marry Bern, or not?"

"I don't," slowly; "but if I have to, I can. What is it that Bern knows on you? Tell me! It's time for me to know!"

"It's this here, Jen," creaked the old man. "He says I killed Little Lige Towers. I don't know whuther I did or not; but a course he can prove 'at I did, ef he wants to. Ye see, Jen, I'd been drunk, an' I woke up 'ith Lige Towers a layin' dead aside o' me. Jen, honey, I don't want you to marry Bern onless ye want to; but—either you'll haf to marry him, or else I'll haf to kill him, one or t'other," and he reached for a loaded rifle.

"I'd rather marry him than for you to kill him," murmured Jen.

Then Bill Harkrader, forgetting a number of things, rushed in at the door and snatched the rifle from Old Nick's shaking hands. He stepped to the doorway and leveled the rifle at Bernhard Lisk.

"Hands up, you, and come here!" he called angrily.

With his hands held a little higher than his shoulders, Lisk approached the man who had the drop on him. Harkrader went on hotly:

"I saw you put that pocketbook in the old man's pocket, and it was empty when you put it there—the night you made him drunk and then lied like a cur dog to his daughter about it. You roundhead, I'm going to call your bluff, Duggar McDonald or no Duggar McDonald; I'm going to march you to the nearest sheriff, whether Duggar McDonald dies or not!"

Bernhard Lisk, that great brute of a man, faced the gun's frowning eye without flinching. He even smiled a little as he stopped some ten feet from the Tennessean.

"I've got a letter here in my pocket," he said to Harkrader, "that I want you to read before you call my bluff. After you've read it, you'll see that it would be very foolish to call my bluff."

"Which pocket?" sneered Harkrader. "Hip-pocket? Gun-pocket?" Harkrader was on his guard.

"No," said Lisk. "Right coat-pocket."

"Lower your right hand slow, take the letter out and drop it," commanded Harkrader. "Start for your gun-pocket and I'll get you—so help me God, I will, Bernhard!"

Lisk obeyed, after which he raised his right hand again.

"It came in on a returning log-train, only a few minutes ago," said Lisk.

An ugly fear gripped the heart of Bill Harkrader.

"Read it to me, Jen," he said. "And be careful that you don't get between him and me."

Old Nick's daughter picked it up, looked closely at the postmark, took out the one folded sheet and read it aloud. It had been postmarked at Rangely, Tennessee, the day before. To it was signed the name of the officer who had hounded Bill Harkrader for twenty-four hours and more, and it stated that Duggar McDonald had died of his injuries and that there was a reward of five hundred dollars for Bill Harkrader.

"Now do you think you want to call my bluff?" smiled Lisk. "Besides, what can you prove against me? Nothing! Oh, you may give me a little trouble, but nothing like the trouble you'll bring on yourself—they'd give you a life term in the pen, if you didn't stretch hemp. It's better to stay here with me until Duggar McDonald's death is forgotten, and be safe. Better reconsider, hadn't you, Harkrader?"

The Tennessean's countenance fell. He was the son of a man who had never put his hand to a feud, who said grace over every meal and held bedtime prayers; he was the son of a woman who lived her life with a Bible in one hand and a broom in the other, a woman who loved everything in the Almighty's fair world except sin and nutmegs.

He had said that he didn't care whether Duggar McDonald lived or died; but now he knew that he had spoken while in the heat of a great passion, that he had cared and cared much. All the black misery in the world was crowding into his heart; he had killed a man, taken one of God's human lives. He had not dreamed that it could be

Digitized by Google

so terrible. Every hope was gone—even that wonderful, golden hope that had been born only that day, of his love and Jen's, was gone.

Through a gray mist his eyes saw Bernhard Lisk pacing to and fro in the cabin yard. But he did not know what his eyes saw. He did not know even that he had put the rifle down.

The woman understood his grief as only women can understand grief. It is the God in them. Jen Maden stepped to him and stood looking up into his white face.

"Don't worry so," she breathed. "Don't worry so."

Bernhard Lisk saw it all, and he knew that Jen loved Bill Harkrader. He went livid with rage. With almost lightning-like quickness he whipped a revolver from a rear trousers-pocket and jabbed it toward Harkrader.

"Don't move!" he snapped viciously. "I'll kill you for resisting arrest if you move! Put out your wrists—and do it quick!"

III

HARKRADER came to himself with a shudder. He knew that he had to obey or die; that there was no alternative. So he put out his wrists. Lisk ironed him, took him by an arm and jerked him roughly to the cabin yard.

"I told you I'd break you if you tried to give me a raw deal, didn't I?" he growled. "Well, I'm going to break you. I'm going to take you to the nearest sheriff for the five hundred dollars reward. There's all the difference in the world, Harkrader, between your taking me to a sheriff and my taking you, you know. Tell her good-by; you'll never see her any more."

Harkrader turned his troubled face toward the young woman in the doorway. He saw that she, too, was grief-stricken.

"Good-by, Jen," he muttered.

"Good-by," replied Jen, tremulously, "and remember, whatever happens to you or to me, I'll always like you better than anybody else in the world."

Lisk scowled and led his prisoner toward the clearing, and he had not gone thirty yards before Jen Maden had her father's rifle leveled at his back. But she couldn't do it; she couldn't kill a man. She put the rifle down. Her father took it up, and there was a hard light in his watery eyes. Jen seized the weapon.

"He ought to be killed," she said brokenly, "but neither you nor me must kill him. Wait. If there's—if——"

Jen broke down and wept as she had not wept since the days of her childhood.

Bill Harkrader slept that night with iron about his wrists and iron about his ankles, and early the following morning he was unceremoniously bundled into a dinky little passenger coach at the rear end of a log-train for the lowlands. Jen Maden and her father looked after him sorrowfully as the train moved off, and he waved his big, powerless hands and tried hard to smile.

Bernhard Lisk, with his deputy-sheriff's badge pinned squarely over his heart, as if he meant it for a target and defiance, sat and watched him with cunning and speculative eyes as they jolted along at a rate of something like eight miles an hour. Suddenly the mountaineer spoke—

"I've been thinking, Lisk."

"Remarkable!" sneered Lisk.

"I've been thinking," repeated Harkrader, "you're a very young man to wear a full beard like that."

"Yes?"

"Yes." The Tennessean went on evenly. "I've heard of men wearing a beard as a disguise. I've been told it makes a perfect disguise."

"Yes?" again.

"Yes." Harkrader was guessing in a wide range, and he believed that he was guessing well. He continued: "And I've heard of men who were wanted badly sticking out in mountain logging-camps, to let certain things be forgotten."

Lisk's eyes narrowed involuntarily. Yet another guess hazarded Harkrader.

"Why did you kill Little Lige Towers?"

The deputy-sheriff superintendent rose and staggered across the roughly rocking little coach.

"Say, you," he bristled, "shut up. You needn't be uneasy. I'm not going to turn you over to any sheriff. I never meant to. I'm only fooling the girl, that's all. When she thinks you're good for a life term in the pen, she'll marry me to save her father from the same fate. It'll be the way of least resistance, and she'll take it, because she'll be broken——"

"So you're a breaker of women too, are

Digitized by Google

you—you coward!" cried out Bill Harkrader.

Lisk went on, unperturbed:

"Because she'll be broken then. You're somewhat wrought up, Tennessee. Want a drink of mountain dew?"

"No."

"No?"

"NO!"

The company for which Lisk worked did not saw its logs; it delivered them daily, sold in the rough, at a big sawmill of the double-band and gang variety that stood in the outskirts of a little town named Barrettsville, in the lowland, near forty miles from the logging-camp. Lisk stopped the train at a siding five miles from the mill and called one of his trainmen to him. He knew he could trust any of his trainmen; they were of the same class as his loggers.

"Cut off this car here, Jimmy," he ordered, "and forget where it is until you get back. Pick it up on the return trip. I have decided to give my friend Harkrader another chance. While the other fellows are shifting cars at the mill, step over into town and buy a marriage license for me—and Jen Maden." There was an old hill preacher living half an hour's walk from the logging-camp.

Lisk gave the trainman a folded banknote. The little passenger car was left at the siding, and the log-train ran on to the mill, exchanged loaded flats for empties, and came back shortly after noontime. The passenger car was coupled at the rear, as before, and the return journey began.

When the empty train was within two miles of the clearing, Bernhard Lisk signaled to the engineer; the engineer pushed in the throttle and applied the brakes. Then Lisk and two brakemen took Harkrader, still handcuffed, from the train and hurried him through the laurels a quarter of a mile and to the head of a deep, dark little cove. Lisk gave a big revolver to one of the brakemen.

"Keep him here until I send you word," said Lisk. "If he tries any tricks, shoot him. Nobody'll ever know it."

With the other brakeman, he hastened back to the waiting train.

Harkrader sat down on a little bank of black sand that the rain-brooks had made, and thought hard. He believed that Lisk had figured correctly; he believed that Jen, thinking him lost to her for all time, with the heart taken out of her, and for the sake of saving her father, would take the path of least resistance—which was giving her body to the brute Bernhard Lisk.

Night fell while he was thinking upon it, and the brakeman-guard lighted his lantern. This guard was a burly fellow with ever-watchful eyes.

"I guess it's all over for me," said Harkrader gloomily, for the other's ears. He looked up slowly. "Bo," he begged, "would you make me a cigarette? You see, I've got bracelets on, and I can't well do it myself."

"Oh, I guess so," frowned the brakeman. But he scarcely took his eyes from Harkrader while he made the cigarette.

Harkrader took the cigarette, dropped it and swore mildly at his luck. The brakeman, too, bent over to look for it. Then Harkrader dug his manacled hands into the black sand and flipped them upward quickly—the brakeman howled with pain as a thousand sharp particles ground into his eyeballs—and the next instant Bill Harkrader rose and drove both his great, hard fists to his guard's face, felling him as the kick of a horse would have felled him. It was the work of but a moment to take the supine and helpless guard's revolver and lantern and start for the railroad.

When he had reached the railroad, he threw the lantern away and hastened on in the darkness.

Half an hour later, with the revolver ready in his still manacled hands, he stole up to a lighted window in the cabin of the Madens. Through one of the little panes he saw the old hill minister and Old Nick; they were not sitting very close together, and between them lay the oft-dyed, oft-sold hound. Old Nick was scowling, and the preacher looked afraid.

Harkrader stole to a lighted window in the other end of the log house and peered in. In that room stood Bernhard Lisk and Jen. Lisk was pleading, promising, and threatening by turns, and it was evident that the girl was about to give in to the force which to her was Titanic.

"It doesn't matter, I guess, what becomes of me, myself," the angry eavesdropper heard her say.

He didn't wait for more. With no more noise than a panther makes when it steals upon its prey, he moved across the rotting doorstep behind Lisk and struck Lisk's great brown head a terrific blow with the

Digitized by Google

butt of the revolver. It seemed underhand, to strike a man like that; but to have invited gunplay would have been to invite danger for Jen.

The sound of Lisk's falling body brought the preacher and Old Nick hurriedly from the other room. Harkrader quietly and sternly took entire command of the situation.

"Stand where you are, preacher," he ordered crisply. "Old Nick, find the irons key in one of Bernhard's pockets and release me. Jen, get ready for a little journey."

Old Nick found the key and freed him from the manacles. The preacher stood very still. Jen put on a faded sunbonnet and an old shawl that had been her mother's; she had neither shoes nor stockings.

"Now listen," said the Tennessean. "We're all—every one of us—going to make a flying trip to the lowland. I'm going to deliver Bernhard Lisk, dead or alive, to the sheriff at Barrettsville. I'm going to call Bernhard Lisk's bluff, if it costs me a life term in the State prison, and save you, Jen! I've got a notion on me that Bernhard has broken his last man."

He shouldered the huge figure of the unconscious superintendent and went out, and the others followed him in silence.

You've seen the hand-cars that are used by the men who keep up railroad tracks. And you've seen little cars of the same size without any levers except a brake-lever, which are used to carry tools and ties.

Bill Harkrader knew where to find a car of this latter-named kind. It was close to the track, at the edge of the clearing. The three men put it on the rails, put Bernhard Lisk and the girl aboard, and climbed aboard themselves.

Harkrader took the brake-lever and started the car with his foot. It was downgrade three-fourths of the way to Barrettsville, and the momentum of the car alone carried it over most of the low places.

They reached the sawmill log-yard a little after midnight, passed a few discreet words with the watchman, and went to find the home of the sheriff. Bernhard Lisk had come to. He was either dazed or sullen; he gave Harkrader little trouble.

The sheriff took charge of Lisk, and placed him in jail. The sheriff's good wife put Jen to bed in a beautiful bedroom, a wondrous bedroom; it was like those poor Jen had read of in books. The sheriff and Harkrader and Old Nick sat up for two hours, talking. The preacher went to sleep listening to them.

Two days later, in the afternoon, Bill Harkrader rushed into Sheriff Kellar's cozy old-fashioned parlor, looking for his sweetheart. Jen rose to meet him, and he saw that she was dressed out and out in new clothing. He took both her hands.

"You're a dream!" he cried; and she smiled up at him sweetly, the man she loved, the man whom a good God had sent to deliver her from a torment. He hurried on: "You won't want me now, I know, for you're a dream! But to the news:

"Jen, you needn't worry about your dad. There's really not much against him, and we're sure to get him out all right. And you needn't worry about me—Bernhard Lisk forged that letter from Rangely—only the envelope was what you'd call bona fide—and Duggar McDonald didn't die! I'll have a fine to pay, and that's all—I'm out on a bond for that.

"They shaved Lisk, and his picture has been hanging in the sheriff's office for years! A posse has just captured nearly all of Lisk's criminal employees, and the rewards are ours! I mean yours, of course, Jen. You're a rich woman, for this section, Jen. I always wanted," with a wink, "to marry a rich woman. But you're such a dream in real clothes. I know you won't want me now!"

"Hush, Bill Harkrader," reproved Jen Maden. "Don't even joke about it. I'm ready to cry, anyway. Hug me and kiss me, Bill Harkrader, and," tearfully, "take me to a preacher and marry me right now!"

Digitized by Google

HEROES ALL by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "The Sinews of War," "Boarders Away!" etc.

"IT'S NOT the kind of work I like to give you, Captain McConaughy," said the Managing Director of the Red Funnel Line, with a perplexed frown.

"What will it be, might I ask, ma'am?" returned McConaughy. "When I signed on wi' the Red Funnel Line, I signed wi'out reserrvations."

"I'm sure you did, Captain. But—this is a job to try a seaman's soul. The Government have requisitioned us to supply a transport for the Dardanelles."

"Throopin'! Eh!" The disgust in McConaughy's voice was eloquent. "I've never been in the passenger trrade, Miss McNish, so I've no observvations of a perrsonal nature; but from all I've hearrd, carryin' soldiers is worrse nor carryin' tourists—an' tourists is verrmin."

"You are right," the Managing Director agreed. "But here is the situation. All my experienced skippers, except you, are at sea. To meet the Government's requirements, I must give them the *Joan of Arc*, the newest and most valuable ship in the fleet. I don't like to send her out under Johnson or Harrod. Who is there but you?"

"There's nothin' else for it," McConaughy assented. "Then I'm to turrn ma men out o' the *Emmaline Pankhurst*?"

"Yes. The sooner the better. The Government people are in haste. As it is, the *Joan* will have to go to the dockyard workers at Cork for refit. She is to carry an entire battalion, I believe, one thousand officers and men."

"Umph!" McConaughy threw oceans of contempt into the grunt. "Isn't that like the English? Always they do be makin' their minds up in a hurry and thryin' to do a thing afther the other man has the lead on 'em. An' so I'm worrkin' for the Crown?"

He chuckled silently.

"Yes, Captain," said Miss McNish swiftly, "and please manage to hold your feelings in check. I'm not more fond of this pig-headed Ministry than you are, but the war is the war, and each of us has to do his bit."

It would be impossible to say that a twinkle glinted in McConaughy's eye. But some hint of a contraction twitched his optic muscles as he answered his employer.

"For the English, as ye know, ma'am, I ha' no use at all. They're an unhandy, self-suffeecient, exasperatin', contemptuous, overbearin' lot o' incompetents—wi' a rare exception now an' then, I must admit. But as I said before, I signed wi' the Red Funnel Line wi'out any reserrvations, an' a worrd from you is an orrder to me—and to ma men."

"That's noble of you, Captain," answered the Managing Director, with a relieved smile. "You are to have *carte blanche* as to stores, and if you want any extra men——"

"I thank ye, ma'am," interposed McConaughy hastily. "But ma own crew will do.

Digitized by Google

I'd rather ha' them I can rely on than the scourin' o' the docks which is all the Navy has left over."

"Suit yourself, Captain, suit yourself," Miss McNish reassured him with secret amusement. "I know men like yours can't be picked up off-hand."

"Ye say well, ma'am," assented McConaughy. "It's an honor ye pay us. And now if ye ha' no more——"

"Yes, that's all, Captain. Clear the *Joan* as early as possible. You'll have escort down channel to Cork."

"Escorrt!" rumbled McConaughy as he closed the door from the Managing Director's private office. "Escorrt! That'll be meanin' more o' these childish English navy men thryin' to teach Miles McConaughy the ways o' the Lorrd's oceans. Hecht! An' I'm a serrvant o' the Crown!"

In the main office he encountered Captain Craven, the Port Superintendent of the Line.

"Did she break it to ye, McConaughy?" asked Craven with a grin on his plethoric crimson face, just such a face as a Port Superintendent should have.

"Aye, she did," returned McConaughy briefly.

Craven's grin exploded into a volcanic chuckle.

"And is there anything by way of stores ye'd like to 'ave put into the *Joan?*" he inquired.

"None that I know of yet. But Apgar's sure to find throuble wi' the provisions made for his engine-room. Ye'll hear from us shorrtly."

"Ye'll get whatever ye want, then."

McConaughy tarried.

"Ha, ye hearrd by any chance where we take on our carrgo—if ye can call such fools as English soldiers carrgo?" he said.

Once more mirth enlivened the corrugated architecture of Captain Craven's face.

"I can't say for sure, McConaughy, but there's a transport fleet concentrating at Cork. The rumor is they are to take on troops from the Curragh of Kildare."

"What? Irishers?"

McConaughy's dismay was apparent, but it gave way immediately to indignation.

"Papish Irishers, eh!" he grumbled thunderously. "D'ye see me, now, Craven—I ask ye, man, d'ye see me—me, Miles McConaughy—pilotin' a shipload o' Irish Papists? I—I'd wreck 'em all in Biscay firrst!"

"It may not be so bad, McConaughy," said Craven soothingly. "All we know definitely is that ye go to Cork for refit. After that it may be Southampton—or Glasgow, even, and some o' your Presbyterian Scotch cousins."

"A good job, too," growled McConaughy. "If we have to muck up the *Joan* wi' soldiermen at all, best they be Ulsterrmen or Scots."

He strode through the streets to the waterfront with a black look on his face. Ardent Presbyterian and Ulster Unionist that he was, Miles McConaughy viewed an English Episcopalian as a milk-and-water Papist and an unconscionably helpless egotist. But the South Irish, whose blood coursed in his own veins, were to him as the spawn of Belial, children of the sulphury pit, itself, minions of that hated creed which he referred to in the time-honored phrase of the Cameronian hill-preachers as the Scarlet Woman. In his estimation, they were ultimate evil.

THE first man he met as he strode up the gangway and over the side of the ancient *Emmaline Pankhurst* was Jock Grant, his huge First Officer.

"Guid morrnin', Sir," Grant hailed him. "Ye didna get the worrd, then?"

"Yes, we ha' the worrd, Mr. Grant," responded McConaughy with gloomy formality—sure sign he was out of sorts. "Where's Mr. Apgar?"

" 'Ere, Sir," whined a nasal voice, and Evan Apgar, Chief Engineer with McConaughy for ten long years, emerged from the engineroom hatchway, wiping his fingers on a ball of waste.

He was an infinitesimal Welshman, black and spidery, who looked as if he had lived out his life in an atmosphere of steam and lubricants.

"Come up to the charrt-house," ordered McConaughy shortly.

In this sanctum he explained briefly his conversations with Miss McNish and Craven.

"We be mortial sinful men, Sir," exclaimed Apgar, casting his eyes aloft when McConaughy had finished; "but we 'avent done nothin' in the sight o' Proffidence, whateffer, to pring town on us such an affliction o' scorpions and sharp-lashet whips."

Digitized by Google

"Papists!" commented Jock Grant slowly, as the full purport of the awful word seeped through his heavy understanding. "Ay, Papists! I canna believe it, Sir! This English Gov'ment are clabberheadit loonies, but they'll ne'er be sendin' Irishers to ficht for 'em against the Turrks, noo. Why, 'twould be plain invitin' one set o' idolaters tae mak' siccar wi' another!"

"We'd best be prepared for the worrst," said McConaughy. "The young leddy yon is a fine brave young leddy, as ye know——"

There was a rumble of assent.

"An' I propose to stand by her. She's a friend to us. We'll be friends to her. We're in the hands o' the Lorrd. I say it wi'out blasphemy."

II

THE *Joan of Arc* came out of the hands of the dockyard refitters, shorn of her feminine personality and name. Gone was her conspicuous red funnel, badge of the Red Funnel Line. Gone the black, white and buff painted upperworks. In place of these she showed a hull streaked in wavy, mirky, grayish-green, dirty-white daubs of neutral coloring, designed to melt into a sea background and hide her from the merciless submarine.

Even her funnel was a sickly gray-green hue that changed its tint with every line of rivets. Her identity was disguised under the combination "H-532." She was no longer a liner of sorts, but a mere numbered and tallied unit in a vast scheme of affairs.

McConaughy looked upon her rapid metamorphosis with foreboding. He was a merchant-skipper, and the ways of the Transport Officers he was thrown in contact with were as strange as they were repugnant to him. The *Joan* was a new command, but even so, she was the crack boat of his owners, and in his regard she held that peculiar place of fetish-reverence which the master-mariner secretly nurses for whatever superior fabric happens to be nearest to him. The *Joan* was more than the *Joan* to McConaughy. She was the most up-to-date product of Harland & Wolff's yards, the pride of Belfast, flagship of the Red Funnel fleet, the last word in marine architecture of her style. She was his immediate idea of perfection.

Therefore he loved her with the jealousy a devoted suitor has for any superlative mistress. He dreaded to witness the desecration of her decks by lubberly soldiers. Every time he visited the 'tween-decks and saw her spacious holds made over into berths for the accommodation of the troops, with long lines of double-tiered bunks, he shuddered and turned resolutely away to seek what solace he could find on the bridge.

He was fresh from just such a visit the day after the *Joan*—or the "H-532," as she was now known—had anchored in the roadstead, when Jock Grant hurried up to him with a pink telegraph slip.

"Frae the Transport Officer," explained Grant.

McConaughy ripped it open without a word. He read

> H-532 will take on board immediately upon receipt of this Fifth Battalion, Royal West Galway Fusiliers, with regimental transport and stores. Officers' chargers will go by Fleet Staff-Transport H-539. The master of H-532 will bear in mind that he is in full charge of his vessel's navigation and the discipline of his crew, but is under no circumstances to have authority over the troops he carries.
>
> Orders as to the movements of H-532 will be communicated by message, wireless or flag signals, as necessity dictates, from the flagship of the Officer Commanding Escort Squadron, and will be obeyed without question. The master of H-532 is recommended to consult with Col. Sarsfield O'Mallagh, the Officer Commanding, Fifth Battalion, Royal West Galway Fusiliers, in all matters wherein the conduct or discipline of the troops on board has relation to the navigation of his vessel. Masters of transports are recommended to bear in mind Transport Officer's Serial Order Z-S574, *in re* necessity for tact in handling such problems as may arise.
>
> This order will take effect upon its receipt.

"It's no guid news ye hae got, skipper?" said Jock uneasily, as the shadow spread across McConaughy's face.

"'Tis not," snapped McConaughy. "But here; read it for yoursel'. We're in the hands o' the Philistines, already."

Jock labored through the communication and handed it back.

"I'll be off to tell Evan," was his only comment.

"Aye," said McConaughy, "an' ye may tell him from me——"

"Ahoy! Thransporrt, ahoy!" came a hail from a small boat ranging up to the *Joan's* counter. "What thransporrt is that?"

"H-532," bellowed Jock Grant. "An' be —— to ye, ye yelpin' clabber-jaws!" he added in slightly lower tones.

"Ha, 'tis safe we are then, God be

Digitized by Google

praised!" rang out a cheery voice with a West Irish brogue a knife could never have sliced through. "We're comin' aboarrd ye, H-532—if it so happens ye've anythin' in the nature av a small flight av stairs."

"Have ye offeecial business?" demanded McConaughy, himself, leaning over the rail.

"As offeecial as military business may be, me dear man."

McConaughy's fists gripped the rail hard.

"Row around to the starboarrd gangway, if ye've a right to come aboarrd," he directed thickly. "If ye ha' not, don't be wastin' ma time."

He walked down the deck toward the gangway, a very fair idea of what was to come shaping itself in his mind, and waited while the two passengers in the small-boat stumbled up the slippery stairs.

"Is the Captain aboard?" asked the first man, who wore the insignia of a colonel on his military greatcoat.

"I'm Captain McConaughy."

By this time the second man had come over-side, and McConaughy saw that he wore a garb that was a mixture of an officer's uniform and the habit of a Catholic priest. The Ulsterman gave no sign of his feelings, other than the lack of hospitality in his manner.

The first stranger cast a quick glance around him.

"She's not a Cunarder, Father," he said, "but she looks a tidy sort of craft, eh?"

The priest nodded.

"Faith, an' I hope she's more steady nor the atom ye persisted in takin' me out here in. Me stomach is still clappin' the bottom av me lungs."

The other officer laughed.

"You'll have to grow sea-legs, Father, and the rest of the men, too, I fancy."

He turned to McConaughy, who had stood by throughout this brief dialogue with murder struggling to break loose in his heart. "Not a Cunarder, indeed! The lily-livered Papistical children o' original sin! Wasna the pride o' the Red Funnel fleet suffeecient for their likes?"

All this was on the tip of McConaughy's tongue to say, but he strangled it by a mighty effort.

"Oh, by the way, Captain," said the officer, "I'm Colonel O'Mallagh, of the West Galway Fusiliers. My people are going with you, I suppose you know. This is Father Cashin, our chaplain."

"'Tis glad I am to meet ye, me son," said Father Cashin cordially, reaching out a hand which McConaughy failed to notice.

A far-away rumble, like the precedent warning of an earthquake was his sole response to the greeting.

"You might take us around," suggested Colonel O'Mallagh. "The men will be off by noon."

"Ye may come wi' me," answered McConaughy rigidly. "She's not a Cunarder—as ye said a minute yon; but she's considered a comforrtable vessel by them that knows the sea. It may be ye won't be satisfied wi' her. If so, I'd suggest ye reporrt to the Thransporrt Officer before it's too late."

Colonel O'Mallagh looked at him curiously.

"I haven't a doubt the ship's all right, Captain," he said quietly.

"Lead on."

"Ye're an Irishman, Captain McConaughy?" panted Father Cashin, as he descended the new companionway the dock-yard men had rigged down the fore-hatch.

"I'm an Ulsterman."

Father Cashin missed a step and dropped down on Colonel O'Mallagh's neck with a mutter of apologies.

"Ah!" was all he said, but there was a twinkle in his eyes that persisted for several minutes afterward.

Speechless, save when conversation was absolutely necessary McConaughy guided his two passengers from one end of the ship to the other. Everything was spotlessly clean and orderly. In case of bad weather, the absence of portholes had been remedied by the erection of auxiliary ventilators running up on deck.

"Very well arranged," was Colonel O'Mallagh's verdict, when they concluded their inspection in his own cabin aft. "Very well, indeed. I used every bit of influence I possessed at Whitehall to get a P. & O. boat or an Atlantic liner; but in the present rush I daresay we're lucky to have secured nothing worse."

McConaughy, in the doorway, choked; shut off the blasphemous words that rose to his lips; experienced a fresh burst of hatred and flared into full eruption.

But as usual when aroused to anger, his voice was level and cold as a chilled-steel blade.

"Through the misconceptions of a dubious

Digitized by Google

Providence or maybe the blunderin' o' fools below," he began, "we are to be shut up on this ship together for some weeks. Ye have a manner, I tell ye plainly, that has no atthraction for me; but I'm wishful to do ma duty by the Line which employs me. Ye're at liberty to do and say what ye please so far as concerrns the men under ye, but ma insthructions place the navigation an' handlin' o' ma ship in ma own hands. From that I'll thank ye to stand aside. And inasmuch as I ha' nothin' to say about your soldiers, maybe ye'll be so kind as to ha' nothin' to say to me about ma ship. If ye ha' just cause for complaint, come to me an' I'll meet your wishes. That's ma orrders. But I canna be havin' any self-suffeecient land-lubber who wears a Colonel's uniform tellin' me ma ship will do because it is no worrse nor it is."

Throughout this harangue Colonel O'Mallagh stood motionless, eying McConaughy at first with an amusement which gave way to anger at the last scorching words.

"But this is insubordination!" he exclaimed coolly. "Would you insult me, man? I'm not the kind to take such words calmly. You have two minutes by my watch to apologize, and if not——"

McConaughy drew from his pocket the telegram he had received immediately before Colonel O'Mallagh came aboard. A contemptuous grin twisted his features.

"Here's ma insthructions," he said. "'The master of H-532 will bear in mind that he is in full charge of his vessel's navigation and the discipline of his crew.' Is that expleecit enough for ye? I'd be very glad to take the subject o' the remarrks ye made just now to an officer o' higher rank nor yourself. An' d'ye think your superiors would be pleased to have throuble sprung on 'em at this moment, wi' the throops on the embarkin' stages, an' sailin' orders issued?"

"It is not my intention to dispute your authority over your own vessel," replied Colonel O'Mallagh. "But you owe a certain respect to the uniform I wear, and I tell you I'll not permit any dirty, rebellious Ulster talk from you or any other man."

The Colonel's eye flashed as he spoke, and his fists clinched involuntarily as McConaughy's eyes flamed back their challenge. But Father Cashin decided that this was the time to interfere.

He caught Colonel O'Mallagh by the sleeve and drew him back into the cabin, out of earshot of McConaughy.

"Are ye mad, sorr?" he pleaded quickly. "'Twould make throuble for all of us if ye mixed it up wid this beetle-browed son av the Pit. The bhoys would be wild; they'd wreck the ship. We'd all be court-martialed, an' insthead av active service an' glory galore, we'd be phack-drillin' in some prison camp. Besides—take this in the right spirit now—the man has ground to stand on. Ye were not kindly in the way ye spoke av his ship."

The anger peeled off O'Mallagh's face as a shower disappears across Killarney Lakes.

"You are right, Father," he admitted. "His ship would mean as much to him, I suppose, as the regiment does to me."

"Ye've said it, me son. Now say it to him. Ye need not give in, but—ye undherstand me."

Colonel O'Mallagh nodded and turned to the dour bulk of McConaughy, standing in the cabin doorway.

"Although your own manner has not been wanting offensiveness," he said, "I want to say that I had no intention of belittling your ship, Captain, or the fine-hearted work you've done in making her ready for my men. I appreciate it."

McConaughy grunted scornfully. He was not to be smoothed over by any half-hearted apology, as he styled the Colonel's words. So his only answer was a gruff:

"I want none o' your appreeciation or thanks. I'll do ma duty, an' tend to ma own business. Do ye do the like, an' we'll ha' no throuble."

O'Mallagh shrugged his shoulders. He had recovered his own temper, and McConaughy's continued disagreeableness was become a source of amusement to him.

"Have it your own way, Captain," he replied. "Life's too short for quarreling with friends when we have all Germany to pick from—eh, Father?"

"Ye shpeak truth," agreed the priest. "An' if I might make so bowld, sorr," he continued, addressing McConaughy, "I'd like to say to ye——"

"I want no advice from your cloth, an' ye might as well know that now," rasped McConaughy.

There was a silence.

"Is there anything ye wish?" he demanded. "I ha' worrk——"

Digitized by Google

"No, nothing," said Colonel O'Mallagh coldly. "Father Cashin and I will remain on board."

III

WHEN the *Joan of Arc* steamed from Cork on the first leg of her voyage, the Fusiliers lined her rails, swarmed in her rigging, massed on every conspicuous spot they could reach, and cheered and sang. First, they sang to the crowds on the shore; then they sang to the passing craft they met in the fairway; and when distance had isolated them they continued to sing to the mocking bluejackets on the attendant destroyers, who knew to the fraction of a sea-mile how long this mood would last.

All went well until the *Joan* rounded a certain headland, where shipping begin to catch the vicious, choppy roll of the Channel, with the ponderous thrust of the whole Atlantic Ocean behind it. McConaughy was on the bridge, and as he saw the succession of rollers heading for them, he turned to the quartermaster at the wheel, with a grim chuckle, and said:

"Ease her off a bit. Aye, so. Let her take it on the counterr."

Those harmless-looking rollers spattered themselves in spewing foam over the *Joan's* fo'c's'le, and there was a howl from the drenched soldiers who had been enjoying themselves in fancied safety. But worse was to come. The shower of foam was followed by a peculiar crossways, retching dip, glide and rebound as the ship came up to meet the rollers, slid off, came up again and bored through. In five minutes her decks were covered with uneasy men, and the songs and shoutings were replaced by the groans of sufferers sore sick with a sickness they had never known before.

The commander of the nearest destroyer ran up a trifle closer at the first sign of the *Joan's* unorthodox performances; but a near view of the state of affairs left him and his men also prostrate wrecks.

"Heaven send we don't flush a submarine just now!" he exclaimed to his second bebetween gales of laughter. "But there's a man over there with a sense of humor. Rudimentary, perhaps, but—I say, did you see those Paddies collapse?"

From the bridge McConaughy viewed the results of his strategy with a face that never altered. Indeed, after a quarter of an hour of trick-work it was unnecessary for him to assist nature. The *Joan* by then was feeling the full influence of the heaving green water, and the Fusiliers had gained such a fair start that they were some laps ahead of the game, as it were. He turned over the bridge to Jock Grant with a feeling of profound satisfaction.

"'Twas a masterfu' stroke, Skipper!" said Jock, who had enjoyed the incident with more than his ordinary appreciation of humor.

"Eh, Jock? What would ye say?"

"Oh, nought," answered Jock, with what he meant for a sly wink.

At the engineroom hatchway McConaughy encountered Evan Apgar.

"Ye may 'ave called it a joke," grumbled the Chief Engineer, "but I wish ye could see t'e floor o' t'e fire-room. T'e coal-passers wasn't ready for such monkeyshines, whateffer."

McConaughy laid one finger alongside of his nose.

"Hecht, Evan man, come wi' me."

He led him gently to the hatchway entrance, whence could be gained an unobstructed view of the deck under the sullen gray evening sky. Apgar took one look and slid down upon his haunches shaking all over.

"I'll say no more, Skipper," he grunted at last.

Luck played into McConaughy's hands. The second day out they ran into a gale that blew up from the breeding-place of the great storms somewhere near the Line. The flagship of the Escort Squadron made signal "Rendezvous at Gib;" the transport fleet parted company; the destroyers scuttled for shelter.

It was a case of making searoom for all. Several score odd vessels, big and little, feel uncomfortable when herded in together under the lash of the mighty winds. As a gale, of course, it was not much to McConaughy. There was one spell of thirty-six hours he spent on the bridge, peering under dripping sou'wester at the stunning seas that breached the bow; but he did this as a matter of principle and habit, rather than because he thought there was any special need for it.

After the wind had moderated he delighted to scare the wits out of the few Irishmen who had earned their sea-legs by taking an

Digitized by Google

occasional breaker over the counter. A day of this hair-raising experience reduced them to a state little better than that of their more unfortunate brethren. Colonel O'Mallagh and his officers were all in the same case. The one man of the Fusiliers who bore up under all McConaughy's devilment was Father Cashin.

Sick as a man well could be at the start of the expedition, the little priest had pulled himself to his feet as soon as he realized the suffering of his "bhoys," as he called them, and from the time the storm broke he was the busiest person on board. He suffered as the others did, but not so much, simply because he kept moving and occupied. He had come up on deck for a much-needed breath of fresh air—the berth-decks were vile from their necessarily shut-in condition—and he was sharp enough to note, landsman though he was, the dexterous maneuvering of the helmsman that brought about the impressive deluges of salt-water.

The hot Irish soul in him flared up in righteous indignation against the perpetrator of such a joke, although he refused to dignify it by this name; and he made his way unsteadily to the bridge where McConaughy stood, sardonically enjoying the rout of the Fusiliers' forlorn hope.

"D'ye call yourself a man, Captain McConaughy?" he demanded at once.

"I do not call maself a Papist," retorted McConaughy.

The priest disregarded this counter-attack, but the hostility in McConaughy's eyes fanned his indignation into ripe anger of a wholesome intensity.

McConaughy started back involuntarily as the little man crowded toward him, hanging on by one hand to the bridge-screens.

"Ye're a broth av a foine, large, upsthandin' man," said Father Cashin, his brogue thickening in his excitement, "and I'm afther supposin'—though ye do not give me warrant for it—that ye must have some repetashun wid your employers to be havin' command av a vessel the like av this. But I say this to ye, freely, Sorr: Ye demonsthrated just now the sinsibility av a schoolboy an' the callousness av a heathen. Ye have gone out av your way to call me out av me religion, an' I'm glad to be afther havin' this to say to ye, in addition: I'm more than pleased that I've nothin' in common wid the likes av you. Ye are sent out at expinse av Gov'ment to do imporrtant worrk, an' how do ye do it? Like an irresponsible bhoy, no less. Blanhanderin' an' blatherskitin' an'——"

McConaughy had been too startled by this outburst to take up the challenge, but now he interrupted with a bull roar of wrath.

"Would ye insult me on ma own bridge?" he shouted. "Get off before I do ye a mischief!"

Father Cashin leveled a single glance at him.

"I'm havin' no fear ye would sthrike me," said the priest dryly. "I've handled men more dhrunk than yourself before now, an' divil a marrk have I to show for it."

"Dhrunk?" roared McConaughy, brandishing a mighty fist. "Dhrunk? Man, are ye daft? Would ye tell Miles McConaughy he's dhrunk on his own bridge? Me, that have never——"

"Even so," interrupted Father Cashin, composedly; as composedly, that is, as a man may who is swinging to the motions of a storm-tossed ship. "What it is ye're dhrunk on I do not claim to know. But no man who was not dhrunk out av his thrue sinses by some unholy passion would act as ye have acted."

McConaughy laughed, a sneering, vaunting laugh.

"Ho, ho! D'ye think because ye're accepted by your Papist flock that ye can speak in parables to me? Ye mean nothin' to me, ma man—nothin' save a matther to be avoided. So now get off ma bridge before I ha' ye put off. I ha' worrk before me—the care o' your immorrtal soul, no less!"

And McConaughy laughed again. But he did not laugh long.

Father Cashin came up close to him, so close that his wagging forefinger agitated directly under McConaughy's chin—Father Cashin was too short to reach his nose; and the eyes of the quartermaster, who was used to cursing in reason, even from his psalm-singing skipper, rolled in terror at the flood of vitriol that the priest poured on McConaughy's head.

"There wasna a blasphemy in all that he said," McConaughy confessed afterwards in recounting what had happened, to Jock Grant. "But the man had the language o' the Bible an' the Prophets a' twisted around the tip o' his tongue. I'm a ready-thinkin' man, Jock, as ye ken; but he had me fashed. I'll admit it. On ma

Digitized by Google

own bridge, too. Ye'll credit ma amaze. I stood there an' listened like a loon."

So he did, and when Father Cashin had finished to his own satisfaction, all McConaughy could think of was to draw out his written instructions for the voyage.

"I ha' listened to all ye've said," he replied as calmly as he could. "Now I ha' this to say. I am in command o' this ship. I am responsible for her navigation. Wi' your perrsonal beliefs an' prejudices I ha' nothin' to do. Ye are obsthructin' ma worrk, so I ask ye to leave me be."

But this was merely stimulating Father Cashin's temper. Once more he stepped on to McConaughy's toes and wagged his menacing finger into the Ulsterman's grizzled chin.

"Will ye undherstand, me man, once an' for all," challenged the priest, "I will not be lettin' the likes av you tell me me dhuty? I know what ye've been up to, addin' to the sufferin's av me poor bhoys, an' if I have a chance some day ye shall sweat for all that ye've caused——"

In desperation McConaughy turned to the helmsman and dropped a suggestive eye towards a mountain of water that was piling up on the starboard counter. A deft flirt of the wheel, and an instant later Father Cashin's new diatribe simmered out beneath a flood that swept him into the port scuppers. Here McConaughy found him and jerked him to his feet.

"Ye limb av Satan—ye—ye——"

"There, now, little man," urged the Ulsterman soothingly. "'Tis no weather for a landsman. Get below."

"Ye did that as ye did before. It was purposed. I saw it."

"Saw what?" asked McConaughy in pained surprise.

"I saw the signal ye were afther makin', an' if ye think—Take your hand off me arrm."

"Here ye are," said McConaughy cheerfully, heedless of the command, as he guided his drenched victim to the companionway. "Mind, now; hang to the handrail."

"I'll not go below while ye are up to your thricks!"

"D'ye perrsist in defyin' me?" said McConaughy sternly. "Who is in command here? Would ye not obey the orrders o' your Colonel?"

"That's neither here nor there. Unloose me. Would ye be layin' your hands on a priest?"

The two confronted each other at the head of the ladder to the deck, and McConaughy was conscious of a grudging admiration for the little man who had outfaced him.

"The priest parrt o' ye means nothin' to me," he growled. "The fact that ye are a man means more. But for the present ye are in the way, an' I ha' not the time to argue wi' you."

Father Cashin perceived the weakening in this attitude and pressed his advantage.

"Very well, then. Will ye give me your word there shall be no more av this wicked playworrk to make sick men sicker?" he pressed.

McConaughy hesitated. To tell the truth he was tired of the whole business. He was not, strictly speaking, a humorist, but he was able to see that if his little trick was suspected it had lost its point.

"Had ye any experience wi' the sea," he said gruffly, "ye'd appreeciate the deeficulties o' the poseetion. But 'twould be expectin' too much from your cloth to ask that—let alone ye ha' lacked opportunities to realize what ye ha' escaped. But I think we are through wi' bad weather for the time."

"I'll hold ye to that last," warned Father Cashin, as he descended the ladder to the deck.

McConaughy watched his difficult progress to the nearest hatchway with interest.

"Hecht," muttered the *Joan's* skipper to himself. "Yon's a fearless bit man. Arrogant wi' papacy, no doubt— 'tis a malignant race. But we'll break 'em yet."

IV

SOMEHOW—nothing is ever kept private for long on shipboard—the story of Father Cashin's interview with McConaughy got abroad, and the feeling between the Fusiliers and the *Joan's* crew, never cordial, became a thing to worry about. Not that the responsible heads on either side gave it a moment's consideration; this is seldom done.

It is natural that soldiers and sailors should disagree. Moreover, McConaughy, for one, took secret delight in the widening of the breach between his men and Colonel O'Mallagh's, when he heard that a brawny

Digitized by Google

Scotch quartermaster had knocked out the Athlone Giant, reputed to be the second strongest heavyweight in the Irish Division.

So there was more or less of an armed truce during the remainder of the *Joan's* run to a certain destination in the Sporades, where the expedition was mobilizing for the last dash at the point of attack. Fights were of too common occurrence to deserve particular notice.

McConaughy and his officers were on scant speaking-terms with Colonel O'Mallagh and his officers. Indeed, when the transport arrived at the base, a rock-bound, submarine-proof harbor in a musical-comedy island, within striking distance of the Dardanelles, and Colonel O'Mallagh went ashore to pay his respects at Headquarters to the Officer Commanding-in-Chief, that functionary regarded him keenly and said:

"What's the matter with your people? My aides report the men look rather fagged."

"We haven't had a very comfortable voyage," answered Colonel O'Mallagh miserably. "And the ship's master and his crew are a set of demons from some Ulster inferno. It's been all we could do to keep them from fighting the Regiment."

"Oh, that's all, eh?" said the General with obvious relief. "Well, don't let it worry you, Colonel. I was afraid we might have to quarantine you or something. We can't spare men for that. If your fellows are longing for a fight, they'll get it."

"Thank you, sir. That's the very word they are waiting for," returned O'Mallagh eagerly. "May I tell them?"

"I've no objections."

An hour later the Fusiliers woke the echoes of the hills that overhung the harbor with their far-flung whoops of joy. McConaughy and his men viewed them somewhat derisively.

"Cannon-food, puir loons," commented Jock Grant.

"Aye," agreed Evan. "Steepit in t'e pitch o' sin, t'e misguitet itiots! What chance 'ave they got? T'e talons o' Satan is fixed in their fitals this minute."

The Fusiliers stopped cheering and began to sing. No, it wasn't "Tipperary," which had outlived its brief fame by this time. Nor was it "Is This Misther Clancey that Kapes the Hotel?" for this, be it remembered, was an Irish regiment. The corps which evinced an interest in the identity of Mr. Clancey were mainly of Cockney extraction.

The song which was bringing the troops on other transports to the rails, to listen in mingled amusement and enthusiasm, was "The Wearing of the Green;" and the Fusiliers sang it as the Irish Brigade at Fontenoy might have sung "The Young Chevalier," with the blood of "Butcher" Cumberland's redcoats still on their bayonets.

"The —— traitorrs!" grunted Jock.

"Repels, that's what I call 'em, inteet!" barked Apgar.

"There's nae doot the English are fuils tae be sendin' such-like for fichtin' wi' the Turrks," continued Jock. "They'll but wait the chance, an' then turrn against us."

Apgar nodded gloomily and they both looked at McConaughy, who so far had said nothing. There was a frown on his face.

"I'm none so sure ye ha' the right o' it," he said at last. "As for rebels, Evan, why 'tis a name I've been proud to bear in ma time—an' so ha' you."

"Would ye speak up for t'e Paapists?" gasped Apgar.

"I would not. But if there's to be fightin' I'm o' the opeenion ye may hearr o' them. D'ye see, now? They're white men, are they not?"

"Aye," chorused Jock and Evan.

"And do ye be meanin' to tell me white men, Papists or no Papists, are not a match for greasy Asiatics? Hecht! I'm lookin' to see a fight worrth while—more especially, d'ye obsarrve, if yon bit priest man gets in."

"Ye talk like a converrt," objected Jock Grant in disgust.

"Say converrt to me, an' I'll bash the head o' ye in, big as ye are!" flashed McConaughy in sudden wrath. "I'm speakin' by the light o' ma obsarrvations, an' wi'out prejudice."

"They're Irish, ye'll atmit?" demanded Apgar.

"Aye, Evan. 'Tis manifest at this moment if ye but listen to their trreasonable song."

"An' Paapists to poot! An' ye 'ave scrappet your own argyment, Skipper, when ye callet their song 'treasonaple'—which it is!"

"Maybe so," admitted McConaughy uneasily. "But there's——"

"An' ye know they're plunget unrepentent in efil, wallowin' in t'e mire o' t'e pit, scornful o' salvation an'——"

Digitized by Google

"Thrue, Evan man, but——"

"Touchin' their state o' sin there can be nae doot, sir," interjected Jock Grant. "If ye gie them the chance o' prreedestination, an' say they hae no choice but tae go i' the de'il's path they were borrn in, then ye hae gied them a' Prrovidence wad allow. Ye'll admit that?"

"Hecht!" roared McConaughy. "I'll admit nothin'. I'm forrgettin' by times I ha' a crew o' theeologians instead o' sailormen. The arrgyement is wi'out benefit to either side. I'm right an' you're wrong. An' ye're right an' I'm wrong. But ye ha' the worrds o' me. I'll say that much."

"Put Jock's claim o' pretestination," interposed Apgar. "I couldn't atmit that, whateffer. Nor you neither, Skipper. That's arrant Prespyterianism, that is."

Jock Grant emitted a bellow of wrath.

"Evan mon, wad ye tempt me tae wring yer neck?" he demanded fiercely.

McConaughy shoved his compact figure between the two.

"D'ye think to dignify your religion by maulin' yersel's before they Papishers?" he inquired. "No more now."

His voice took on the icy ring it acquired in times when he meant to be obeyed. Grant and Apgar promptly wilted.

"We'll ha' no more o' this arrgyement," he cut off their stumbling explanations. "An' don't be givin' me cause to rremind ye again. Get to your engines, Evan. Jock, I'll see ye in the charrt-house."

In a way, McConaughy was secretly ashamed for the stand he had taken against his First Officer and Chief; and yet, at the same time, he found himself advancing reasons for the belief that the Fusiliers, and particularly Father Cashin, were not so black as he had first painted them to himself. Why this was so, he could not understand. For a Papist to McConaughy always had been the most despiteful of creatures, surpassed in evil possibilities only by an Irish Papist. He had been brought up to believe that the physical connection of Ulster with the three southern provinces was the result of some handiwork of the devil, designed as a sore temptation and scourge of the faithful.

Now, he found himself trying to advance excuses for an Irish Papist, and a priest at that. But outwardly, his attitude toward Father Cashin was as disdainful as ever, and as for Colonel O'Mallagh and his officers—why, McConaughy did not look at them, if he could help it.

During the week that the *Joan* lay at the base, many other ships joined the transport fleet, some coming from Alexandria, some from Marseilles—loaded with warworn veterans of the Flanders trenches, these; and some from home. Stout old individualist and hater of official authority—as expressed in terms of British officialdom—though he was, McConaughy was impressed by this tremendous assemblage of craft, far and away the greatest he had ever seen. But what most impressed him and his lieutenants was the enormous cost of it all.

"Man, man," McConaughy confided one day to Jock Grant, after they had finished checking over the indents of several hundred tons of new stores. "D'ye appreeciate the awful recklessness of it all? Money! Why, it means nought to these English officer men. They willna bother themsel's to read a paper if it accounts for less nor a thousand pounds. 'Tis dreadful! Fair wickedly wasteful!"

"I wadna waste porritch as they Commissary loons waste fresh beef," agreed Jock. "Ma requisition ca'ed for but ten hunerdweight, but rather nor carrve a carrcass they gied me fifty pun' addeetional, an' laughed when I asked a crredit for other stores."

"Evan is the man that enjoys it all," said McConaughy, with a grin. "He's stocked up wi' engine-room supplies till his lockers ha' flowed over, an' but this morrnin' he came to me, askin' could he ha' room in the forepeak for a fresh case o' lubricants."

"For the English it may be a' richt," said Jock, as he moved toward the door. "They'll be dyin' soon or late, wi' their bloody fechtin' hither an' yon. An' a mon may live well whiles he has the opportunity. I'll nae begrudge it tae 'em. I'm wishfu' we had the same chance before us."

"What? Dyin'?" asked McConaughy grimly.

"Nae, ye dinna catch ma drrift, Skipper. I'm nae mair overanxious for dyin' than yersel'. But I could pleasure masel' in the fechtin' when it comes."

"That ye could, Jock. An' so could the rest o' us."

Something in McConaughy's tone attracted Mr. Grant's attention.

"Hae ye a meanin' hid beneath they worrds, Sir?" he asked.

Digitized by Google

"I said what I said, Jock," returned McConaughy. "But——"

He hesitated.

"I'd enjoy the fightin' as much as yoursel'."

"Ye hae a plan, then?" pressed Jock.

"I ha' hopes, Jock, ye might say. An' I ha' a deep confidence the Lorrd is indulgent to them that mingle hopes wi' prayers."

"If prayers will do it, there's nae doot at a'," said Jock relievedly. "I'll mak' every gowk i' the fo'c's'le pray till his shinbones ache."

Three o'clock of a raw Spring morning found the *Joan* pitching restlessly on the Ægean swell, one of a mob of ships herded vigilantly by swift destroyers, all steaming at ten knots toward the shores of Gallipoli —cruisers, transports, mine-sweepers, trawlers, tugboats towing strings of lighters. There was no sleep on any craft. Sailors and soldiers all crowded the railings, straining into the thick gloom ahead, as yet unbroken by the sunrise flare.

In and out along the busy deck Father Cashin pushed his way, attending to a hundred and one details that were beyond the ken of any Line officer. He saw to it that the youngsters had their kits packed right; suggested the proper proportion of "the rale stuff" to mingle with water in the canteen; cautioned the lazy to tallow their feet thoroughly; and paused now and then to write a letter for a man who was glad to avail himself of the priest's fluent fountain-pen.

"Don't be shparin' yourself a mite av botheration, Timmie," he would say. "It's yourself will be glad for the pains ye've took this time tomorrer—if ye have the luck to be alive. But I needn't be so encouragin'! An' have ye confessed?"

In the excitement aboard the *Joan* the differences of the past were forgotten or laid aside. Colonel O'Mallagh stood beside McConaughy on the bridge, by formal arrangement prepared to lend any assistance he could in the difficult task that confronted them. They were united by a bond of common interest.

"How far is it now?" asked O'Mallagh for the second time in two hours.

"About ten miles I make it," returned McConaughy, glancing at the special Expeditionary chart pegged on a small shelf by the binnacle—the only light showing above the water-line, except for a tail-lamp over the stern. "But wi' all this rabble 'tis——"

He was interrupted by a hail from close aboard, and crossing to the starboard wing of the bridge, he looked down on the narrow black hull of a destroyer that had ranged alongside.

"Ahoy, H-532," came the hail again. "This is the *Flitterwing*, destroyer."

"Ay," said McConaughy.

"Our orders are to take you in. We'll pilot you to your anchorage and stand by to cover your landing operations. Have your boats swung out and ready for emergency. Don't lose us."

"Ay," repeated McConaughy indifferently.

What a pother and fuss about a perfectly simple operation! he growled to himself. But that was the way of the English Navy.

The destroyer slipped ahead; the quartermaster at the transport's wheel put the helm over a trifle, and she followed in the wake of the smaller craft.

McConaughy returned to his position by the binnacle.

"There's the sun at last," said O'Mallagh.

He pointed to a streak of light that shot up into the eastern sky. But before the words were well out of his mouth, a far-off, muffled boom reached them.

"No, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "It's the Turks!"

The boom became a full, deep-throated roar, and the eastern horizon was lambent with the flashes of the mouthing guns. The cannonade grew and swelled in majestic dissonances, until it seemed to split the portals of the night.

Then, all in a moment, the sun leaped up over the low hills of the land ahead of them, and day dawned gloriously, with the many-hued splendor of an Ægean sunrise. It was as if a curtain had been snatched from some mighty proscenium.

One minute all had been indistinct; the next the watchers on the *Joan's* bridge saw the great panorama stretching away before them, heaving waters, and dark warships, and a rugged, woody shore, broken by small promontories and bays, rimmed by a narrow beach.

Other transports were in closer than the *Joan*, and from some of them men were already swarming into the tenders and small boats. And now the fire of the Turks tripled in volume. To the roar of the big guns was joined the rattle of rifle fire and the

Digitized by Google

staccato clatter of machine-guns, drumming, dr-rrumming, dr-rr-rr-umming.

The water around the tenders close in shore was lashed into foam by the projectiles. A tug crammed to the guards with Highlanders caught a 4.7-inch shell in her boiler, and went down in a horrid smother of smoke and steam, leaving the sea dotted with bobbing heads. Tenders and small boats were in trouble on every hand, but those uninjured kept on, and every man in the water who could swim aimed for the beach, rather than for the transports.

Despite himself, McConaughy was impressed again. He preserved his characteristic phlegm with some effort, but beneath the surface he was deeply stirred. This was bigger than anything he had ever imagined. It was different. It was enormous. The ruthlessness of the idea of throwing all these men into such terrible danger appealed to his own love of power. He itched to have a share in it, to be in control of it. Surveying the field, he was telling himself already that if it had been his plan he would have done thus-and-so.

"Wasteful! Just like the English," he grunted. "Why do they no prreten' they do be plannin' something else? 'Tis batterin' out the brains o' they chaps to fling 'em all against the one cove."

"Quite right, I daresay, Captain," agreed Colonel O'Mallagh, peering through his binoculars at the first files of men struggling ashore. "But our fellows have made it already, you see."

"They're so much nearer slaughterr, then," returned McConaughy. "Ah, d'ye see that?"

The thin line of men that reached across the beach shivered and flew to pieces under some invisible strain. They never reached the bushes and cover. The same fate awaited the second line, and a third, fourth, and fifth. The British straggled out of the surf, weary and panting, only to face the fire of an enemy they could not see, lying protected in masked rifle-pits. Every step they took they stumbled on barbed wire, ingeniously woven through the sand, and even running down into the sea, so that in many cases their boats could not venture close in.

"Here comes the *Flitterwing*," said McConaughy, as the destroyer turned and made back to them.

She steamed close and an officer hailed:

"Slow down, H-532. The admiral has wirelessed to hold you."

"Is the attack abandoned?" called O'Mallagh.

"Don't know. We're going in to support, though."

While the destroyer was turning her nose to the shore her bluejackets were loading the four-inch guns she carried fore and aft, and before she was under way once more they had opened fire, their shells kicking up the sand in the bushes that lined the beach just above the heaps of bodies that marked the limit reached by the landing parties.

McConaughy shrugged his shoulders.

"Firrst, d'ye obsarrve, we were goin' to ha' a land battle," he remarked. "Now, 'tis to be a sea battle. Marrk the consistency o' the English. They're a grrand race, and consistency is one o' their grrandist trraits."

The Irishman snapped his binoculars back into their case.

"True, perhaps," he said. "But it is easy enough for you to talk. You are here in safety, Captain. In all probability, you will never be in danger. But do you suppose those poor devils over there on the beach found fault with their superiors? Not they."

A brick-red flush crept up McConaughy's neck.

"D'ye—d'ye—mean I'm—I'm afraid?" he gasped.

"I'm not seeking a quarrel with you," replied Colonel O'Mallagh quietly. "I'm merely telling you that it is not becoming in a man like yourself, who is not called upon to run any risk, to criticize the men who are not afraid to risk all."

"Ye mean I'm afraid, just the same," roared McConaughy. "Ay, I know ye! Hecht! Let me tell ye, no man yet told Miles McConaughy he feared aught but the Lorrd! An' if ye'd seek to tell me now, ye'll be the last!"

"I'd advise against making a scene, Captain," said O'Mallagh coolly. "I think you'd find yourself in a serious position if you tried to start any trouble——"

"Who said aught o' trrouble?" demanded McConaughy. "I'm tellin' ye this alone: Where ye go, I'll go—ay, an' farrther, too, if there's land to walk on, or sea to swim in!"

"All right, I'll be glad to have you."

"Ye will, before ye're through," responded

Digitized by Google

McConaughy grimly. "Now, d'ye still want to get ashore?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm askin' ye a question. D'ye still want to get ashore?"

"Yes, but the *Flitterwing*——"

"De'il take the *Flitterwing*!" bellowed McConaughy. "Why should I heed her?"

A glance showed him the destroyer had proceeded to the southward on a reconnoitering tour, dropping shells into the hills at intervals to draw the fire of the Turks. The transport fleet lay just behind them, but there were no warships in the immediate vicinity; and ashore the fire had died down as the British retreated.

"Tell me this?" resumed McConaughy to the bewildered O'Mallagh. "In the cirrcumstances ye're in command here—are ye not?"

"I suppose so."

"An' ye can ordherr me to do what ye will?"

"Yes."

They were interrupted by the simultaneous arrival from opposite directions of Father Cashin and Jock Grant. Jock said nothing, merely placing himself behind his captain. Father Cashin was more bellicose.

"Are ye fightin' again, McConaughy?" he asked with scant courtesy.

"Not yet, little man," grinned McConaughy. "But ye'll get your bellyful soon if I ha' ma way."

He confronted O'Mallagh again.

"Now, then, will ye guarantee ma owners against loss if I put ma ship at your disposal?"

"I don't follow you, Captain," answered O'Mallagh, with a puzzled shake of the head. "What's all this——"

"No, no," McConaughy broke in impatiently. "I'm offerin' to put ye ashore—d'ye ken ma meanin? Firrst ashore o' your whole Arrmy! Now, will ye sign a paper that the Gov'ment will indemnify ma owners if aught happens to the ship?"

"You are very careful before you make this great attempt," thrust O'Mallagh.

A light flamed up in McConaughy's eyes. But Father Cashin intervened with a quick nod of appreciation.

"The man's right, Colonel, Sorr," he said. "He has his dhuty to his ownerrs. The ship must be costly, an' he has no call to be riskin' her widout authority."

"Very well," said O'Mallagh. "I'll sign an order assuming responsibility for the ship. What's your proposition?"

"By your leave—firrst," McConaughy interrupted, producing a notebook. "Ha' ye a fountain pen, little man?"

"I have that, me big bucko," returned Father Cashin.

"It might be as well to write out the orrdher now," continued McConaughy. "We'll take no chances. It'll mean the offside o' a hun'erd an' twenty-five thousand pounds for ma ownerrs."

Colonel O'Mallagh cursed in aggravation at the Ulsterman's cool deliberation, but a warning poke from the priest held him to a peaceful course. He scratched a hurried order pressing the *Joan* into emergency service, and guaranteeing her owners compensation for any damage which might result to her.

"Are you satisfied, my long-winded friend?" he asked as he handed it over. "From your talk I thought you'd have us landed by this time?"

"We'll be there soon enough to please ye," rejoined McConaughy placidly, tucking the precious paper away in a waterproof wallet.

"An' what will ye be doin', Captain?" inquired Father Cashin.

"Run ye ashore."

"What?" exclaimed O'Mallagh.

"Ay, run ye ashore—so ye can just tumble from the lower-deck carrgo-porrts into the surrf. An' afther that the rest o' the Arrmy can come in behind us, takin' our wake. Hecht, man, we'll show the English a lesson, if ye ha' the guts to stand the gaff!"

VI

McCONAUGHY could not have picked out a better or more psychological moment for the execution of the exploit which was to make his name a household word in the Levant. The British transports had drawn out of range of the shore-batteries, which were still engaged with the heavier ordnance of the warships, and the Turkish infantry in the beach-trenches had relaxed their vigilance. Being McConaughy, he sized up the situation at a glance.

"Ye'd best get your men below," he said to O'Mallagh. "There'll be the less chance for hurrt. Keep undherr coverr, all o' ye. Rremember, we're wantin' to take yon Turrks by surrprise."

Digitized by Google

O'Mallagh, with Father Cashin at his elbow to prompt him, accepted McConaughy's orders with unwonted meekness. The wondering and protesting rank and file of the Fusiliers were sent below, and cooped up in the hold. The *Joan* appeared again as an innocent cargo-boat, luridly painted but otherwise guiltless of indications of her military character. Having seen to this, McConaughy paid a visit to the engine-room, where he found Evan Apgar sweating industriously over a smoking bearing.

"Dhrop that foolery, Evan, man," he directed. "We've serious matthers undher foot."

"What?" demanded Evan rather surlily—the *Joan* was a kittle ship, and he had few chances at the tinkery that was meat and drink to his artist's soul.

"We're goin' to run ashore. An' I want every ounce o' steam ye can cram into her."

"Name o' John Wesley!" shouted Apgar. "Are ye maad, whateffer?"

"Did ye ever know Miles McConaughy mad, Evan? No, I'm angry. Whist, it may be I'm foolish to risk our mortial bodies this way—I'm no worryin' about the souls o' any o' ye; though I'm thinkin' the Irish'll be in a bad corner o' Hell, if anything goes wrong—but 'tis a grrand thing for the owners."

"For t'e owners?"

Blank bewilderment showed in Apgar's face.

"Ay, Evan. The English assume full responsibeelity for our loss. Hecht, d'ye see the point? In the hands o' the English I knew we'd lose the *Joan* sooner or lather, so I've fixed it that we get back her value at the starrt-out."

"But ye'd run her ashore under t'e guns?"

"Ye're not afraid, are ye?"

"Afraid? Me? Ah, Skipper, ye know well Evan Apgar ain't afraid whateffer."

"Good. Here's what I want."

McConaughy sketched briefly the situation, and Apgar was convinced, heart and soul.

"If it's speed ye want, ye shall 'ave it, sir," he cried. "We'll show t'e Paapists if we're afraid."

He leaned over the brass rail that walled-off the narrow grating on which he sat amongst his gauges and levers, and shrieked aspirated instructions in mingled Welsh and English to the stokers who toiled in the fire-room.

On the bridge McConaughy found Colonel O'Mallagh, Father Cashin, and Jock Grant, erecting a rough barricade around the chart-house. It was not exactly bullet-proof, but it provided some shelter.

"Full speed ahead," was McConaughy's greeting. "Jock, give Evan the signal. Quarrterr-mastherr, set your course by yon sunken lighter, an' make for the center o' the bit o' bight ye see sthraight ahead o' ye."

He turned to O'Mallagh.

"Ha' ye machine-guns? Well, ye might bring 'em up on deck, wi' some good gunners. We'll need some cover against the fire they Turrks will be puttin' on us."

O'Mallagh hastened to carry out the suggestion. By this time he did not require a nudge or a word of whispered expostulation from the priest. He was hypnotized by the cold, ferocious energy of the Ulsterman.

"Ye'll be makin' for the center av the little harbor?" asked Father Cashin.

"Ay," said McConaughy. "They'll be firin' at us from both sides, an' half the time they'll be shootin' each other."

"Man, man, but ye're a devil," said the priest admiringly.

"I thank ye," was McConaughy's dry acknowledgment.

The *Joan* had gathered way on her, and now she was steaming along through the quiet sea at a smashing clip. Her throbbing engines were driving her as she had never been driven before, as Apgar would never have dared to drive any save a doomed vessel. What mattered it if the bed-plates did rock against their courses, if piston-rods tore back and forth with a violence that threatened disjointment of their connections?

She had separated from the body of the transport fleet before anybody noticed her conduct. The warships were all preoccupied in their methodical searching out of the Turkish land batteries. And the Turks were too busy dodging the warships' shells to pay any attention to the lone steamer that came tearing inshore toward the spot where so many brave men had drowned a few minutes before. She had covered half the distance when the nearest warship perceived her and sent a string of signal flags fluttering up to a yard-arm—McConaughy had taken the wireless man from his post, and

Digitized by Google

Jock Grant privily had heaved a fire-ax into the heart of the dynamos.

McConaughy viewed the signal through his binoculars.

"Wait for proper support," he read aloud. "Attack suspended."

"We ought to answer that somehow," said Colonel O'Mallagh nervously.

"An' they'd ha' ye up for disobedience o' orrdhers, like as not—though ye won 'em the battle," returned McConaughy disparagingly. "Not if ye'll take my advice, ye won't."

"I'm thinkin' Captain McConaughy is in the right," said Father Cashin hastily.

O'Mallagh nodded dumbly, and the signals went unheeded.

The *Joan* steamed on; the miniature capes that bounded the small bay already reached out wooded arms to embrace her. They were within easy rifle-range when the first shell pitched over, and a blast of rifle fire swept the beach.

"Shall we answer that?" called O'Mallagh.

McConaughy shook his head. His face was set in grim lines; he stood, with legs apart, hands jammed into his pockets, by the quartermaster at the wheel, peering through slitted eyes at the perilous course. The Turks were firing wildly, with traces of demoralization. Most of their shots went wide of the target. But presently bullets began to *plunk-plunk-phut* into the ironwork, and an occasional shell sprinkle shrapnel on the decks.

"Shouldn't we begin firing now?" appealed Colonel Mallagh again, as a bullet flicked into the planking at his feet.

"Not yet," said McConaughy sternly. "Now, then, quarrterrmastherr, lash your wheel. So. Lie down all o' ye. When we take the ground 'twill be enough to knock the legs from undher ye. Pass the worrd along."

Prone on the deck they lay, McConaughy and huge Jock Grant—a silent witness of all that had happened—and O'Mallagh, the priest and the quartermaster.

"I'm fearful many av your men will be comin' to harrm, Captain," Father Cashin found time to whisper. "They've no place to go, but this God-forsaken ship, an' she'll be a sieve in no time."

"We'll ha' the same chance as you," replied McConaughy. "D'ye think we'll sit idle whilst the heathen shoot at us?"

BEFORE Father Cashin could answer, the *Joan* struck. It was cataclysmic, that moment. She drove into the shore like a nervous racehorse bent on smashing its brains out against the stable-wall. Her bow bit deep into the sand, heaved upward in a slather of dirty foam, and crashed down again half her length up the beach, with a wrench that tore the plates asunder from garboard strake to water-line. She landed right side up, shuddering, her whole length on the bottom and less than a man's height of water around her bow.

McConaughy leaped to his feet as she strained motionless.

"Now," he yelled. "Shoot for all ye're worrth, Irishers!"

The answering cheer of the Fusiliers was drowned in their own firing. The cargo-ports forward on either side dropped away, and men began to tumble into the water. But McConaughy did not wait for this. He and Jock Grant jumped down to the deck, rounded up the crew and lowered away every life-boat on the davits. Everything that could float they put overside, crates, hatch-covers, spars and lumber, the machine-guns operated from the shelter of the bulwarks giving some protection to the work, although men began to drop here and there on the decks.

In the pressure of events, however, McConaughy forgot Colonel O'Mallagh, an oversight he was made aware of only by the indignant appearance of that officer just as the last life-boat struck the water, and promptly swarmed with waiting Fusiliers.

"This is a fine business!" stormed O'Mallagh. "Here are the Galway Fusiliers going into action for the first time in history—as his rage increased, he lapsed into brogue—"widout their commandin' officer. Would ye be puttin' a dishgrace upon me, Sorr?"

"I would not," said McConaughy, chuckling. "Lend a hand here, an' we'll compose the deefficulty."

He led the way amidships to where a life-raft reposed on the well-deck.

"'Tis an onwieldy craft," he continued, "but I'm thinkin' we can put her in the wather. Anyhow, 'tis your last chance, unless ye can swim."

O'Mallagh, Father Cashin and a few of the *Joan's* crew bent their backs to the task of hauling the raft on rollers across the deck.

Digitized by Google

The bullets snicked all around them; one of Apgar's Welshmen coughed and died just as they had her poised over the water. But they made it, and Jock Grant leaped down first, with a couple of oars, to steady the clumsy thing. Then they lowered a Jacob's-ladder, and McConaughy motioned to O'Mallagh to descend. He climbed down gingerly. Father Cashin stood back when his turn was called next, and the few remaining members of the crew, headed by Apgar, descended.

"Go on, little man," said McConaughy at last.

"An' lave ye here longer nor any wan av us to be a marrk for the bullets ye're riskin' by reason av our taunts? What d'ye think I am?"

"A brave bit Jesuit," returned McConaughy. "But down ye go. 'Tis the law o' the sea: a masther must leave his ship the last."

"Ye'd blanhander me again, I'm thinkin'," began Father Cashin sturdily.

"I'd do nothin' o' the sorrt," snapped McConaughy, ducking involuntarily as a three-inch shell tore the corner off a deckhouse, and sent the splinters hurtling about where they stood. "D'ye think I'm sthandin' here for the fun of it? Go on, I tell ye, unless ye wish to ha' my death on to your soul."

Father Cashin descended the ladder as meekly as had Colonel O'Mallagh.

Despite his pretended nervousness, McConaughy was not in any haste to leave. A single look assured him that the party on the raft were safe for the time being, for the Fusiliers already had cleared the bushes of the enemy on that side of the bay and were making good their grip on the Turks' second-line trenches along the crest of a slender line of hills beyond. The firing was coming mainly from the opposite side of the bay, still held in force by the enemy.

What interested him particularly, however, was the visible effect produced in the invading army by the *Joan's* exploit. The transports, escorted by the warships, were all steaming in towards the landing-place, the warships endeavoring to keep down the fire of the Turks as much as possible by dint of impetuous use of their own batteries against the shore positions. While he watched, several of the larger transports, including a giant Cunarder, which carried a whole brigade in her capacious hull, dropped anchors and began discharging men into their attendant trawlers.

"Just like the English!" he muttered to himself. "Two ways to do it, an' bein' English they took the wrong way. Hecht, but they're a stubborrn race!"

He was aroused from his observations by a firm grasp on his arm, and looked down at Father Cashin.

"Ye mad man!" rasped the little priest. "The lives av the rest av us may not mather, but can ye not see there is a rig'mint, more or less, av Turrks on the shore over forninst ye, all thryin' which shall have the honor av shplittin' your thick skull? Think shame av yourself, man, an' treasure the immortal life the Lorrd has suffered ye to retain."

And this time it was McConaughy who meekly led the way down the Jacob's-ladder, thereby violating the inexorable law of the sea for the first and only time in his venturesome career.

They found the left wing of the Fusiliers, their Major dead, and some scores of men out of action, digging into shelter on the rim of the beach. This section of the regiment had been severely punished in getting ashore, because they had been the last to leave the ship and the Turks had had an opportunity to recover from the first shock of surprise. The men were inclined to be a trifle dazed, like all new troops when called upon to sustain severe punishment and denied a chance to retaliate.

Colonel O'Mallagh won them back their nerve by gravely stalking up and down, pistol in hand, and taking occasional potshots at the bushes whence flashed the Turkish volleys. But it was McConaughy and Father Cashin who led them to victory.

McConaughy, in the first place, collected all of his own men who were still alive, armed them with guns taken from wounded Fusiliers, and marched them into the battle-line. Wherever he went, Father Cashin was not far away. And in ten minutes they had bedeviled, beshamed and bedamned the half-beaten Fusiliers into the belief that they could lick everything under a fez between themselves and Constantinople.

"Is it ready ye are to scalp the omadhouns, bhoys?" shouted Father Cashin, as he bounded to his feet, his only weapon the gold crucifix he held up before their eyes.

"Only thry us, Father, dear!" they answered.

Digitized by Google

"An' will ye let the Papists lead ye?" bellowed McConaughy to his company.

A hoarse roar was the reply, and Evan Apgar's Welshmen raised the nasal strains of a hymn.

McConaughy sprang forward.

"Afther the heathen, men!" he called.

The *Joan's* crew rallied to the appeal. Father Cashin got the Fusiliers from their shallow pits in the sand. Colonel O'Mallagh puffed into a run and shouldered his way to the front. That is the whole story. The Fusiliers and the *Joan's* men swept over the sand-dunes, stormed into the bushes, leaped down on the startled Turks who scrambled up to meet them and then went on with bloodied bayonets.

When the van of the reinforcements waded through the surf they found a thin, ragged line of Irish Catholics and Ulster-Scotch-Welsh Protestants holding the shore and raving and singing together. On a scrubby hill, which was covered knee-deep with what had been Turkish askares, a small group of ill-assorted men were holding a solemn council-of-war to determine whether they should march on to Constantinople. It was with difficulty that the first general officer to come ashore—a rather nervous brigadier, with three months of general staff training—restrained them from carrying out this ambition.

"A most magnificent piece of work, gentlemen," he said a score or two of times. "Most magnificent. Gad — magnificent! Splendid for the morale, y' know. Tonic effect. But not war. No, by gad, not war!"

As they came away from the audience, McConaughy put his arm around Father Cashin's shoulders.

"Little man," he said, "do ye be really tellin' me ye are a priest o' Rome?"

"Me big bucko," retorted Father Cashin solemnly, "are ye really one av these bla'-guard Ulster rebels?"

"Hecht!" McConaughy chuckled. "Ye're a man, priest or no priest. An' for the rest, I'm no sayin' the Irish canna fight—when they're well led, d'ye see, an' they're supporrted prroperrly."

The priest caught him by the elbow.

"McConaughy," he exclaimed, "ye're a man, yourself! But the heart av ye's harrd an' narrow. Look at that hill where we fought. D'ye see it?"

"Ay."

"There's good men's blood soakin' that ground. Blood av Catholic Galway, an' blood av Protestant Ulster an' Scotland an' Wales. An' d'ye mean to tell me, McConaughy, there was any difference in the way those men died?"

"All men die one way," said McConaughy slowly.

"Ay, just so. 'All *men* die one way.' Ye've said it for me. They died together, those men on the hill, an' one died as readily as the other."

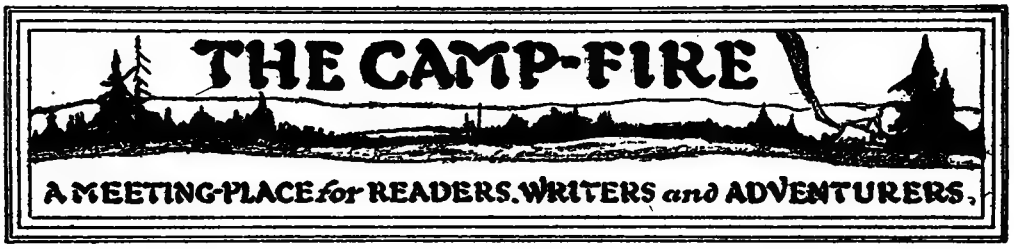
"That's thrue," McConaughy conceded.

"Then, I ask ye what is religion between men?"

And Miles McConaughy, Ulster Presbyterian—with leanings toward predestination—crushed the priest's hand in his hard paw.

"'Tis just nothin', little man," he said simply. "Just nothin'."

Digitized by Google



FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom Henry Martel Gwynn rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

I was born in Washington, D. C., 1885. In 1904—to skip a rather insignificant period—I was appointed a midshipman to the United States Naval Academy. It was during my term there that the now famous hazing investigation took place. I resigned in 1908 and was appointed Lieutenant of Philippine Constabulary.

I WAS a witness to the eruption of Taal volcano, and later did relief work among the sufferers.

Without a warning of any kind, a massive gray column of mud and ashes shot up into the air for hundreds of feet. During the entire day it rose, a gray sheet in the sunlight; night came, hiding it from view. Those that had been afraid crept back to the shelter of their homes. Then out of the darkness the earth trembled, blinding lights flashed in the heavens and, rending its crater to pieces, Taal belched forth a seething, molten mass. Beneath it whole *barrios* disappeared—marked now only by a hill of queer-looking stone; farther back, people ran and were trapped; streets sank abruptly and big Spanish houses toppled and fell. For nine days the earth shook, then began the work of collecting the dead, with a bread-line for the living.

LATER I was transferred to the province of Tarlac to join in the big hunt for Felipe Salvador, whose name is as familiar in the Islands, and for the same reasons, that Villa's is in this country.

In 1911 I was detailed to investigate the murder of two Chinamen, who, rather courageously, had run a crooked gambling game in a semi-civilized community. While on this trip I was caught in a typhoon and sought shelter in a little mining camp in the mountains of Benguet. There were four native shacks here. Two of them the wind felled and the people, crawling out from under, crept into ours. The third was struck by a boulder and twelve natives were carried out with it into the river below. We lashed the rafters of ours to the corner posts and then waited, listening to the rain driving wildly against the nipa walls and to the big rocks crashing down the mountain. There was a look of the end in every man's eyes when dawn finally came.

THE year 1912 found me in the city of Canton, a witness to the establishment of a Chinese republic. The step from subject to citizen was accomplished by the shears. Brawny individuals armed with heavy scissors roamed the streets and whenever a pig-tail appeared its owner was seized and in a clip he became a republican. From the expression on some of their heathen faces the loss was more religious than political. I think many of them sought such consolation as is found by those who kneel down to stone images.

On the other side of the picture, there were desperate efforts toward military preparedness. In every vacant plot was a squad, awkward, nondescript, carrying sticks or at best the cast-off armament of some other nation. I saw companies of boys pronounced fit, marching out to fight, whose state of fitness did not extend beyond the manual of arms.

FROM Canton on to Tsing Tao, a city, then, of lonesome Germans. Thence to Kobe and up through Japan. The rest is a succession of names: India, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, France and at the end, America.

AS TO the story, "The Man Who Built Up from the Ace," it is woven out of my own loneliness while stationed in the town of Rosario, Batangas, during a cholera epidemic—that much and the cards are real.

I hope to meet many old friends at the Camp-Fire.

HAPSBURG LIEBE has been giving us stories since 1912 and, though he has spoken several times at our Camp-Fire, I was surprised today to find that by some strange chance I had failed to pass on to you the account of himself he gave me for you more than four years ago. My apologies to you and to him, and here it is. He did, by the way, send me the autograph of Alejandra de la Cruz.

These adventures I am taking from my diary, kept for the several years during which I was a soldier in the Philippines. I was in Japan and Hawaii, but I had no adventure there worthy of note. I was in a mix-up between a bunch of Americans and tars from the French man-of-war *Finant* and from H. M. S. *Terrible* in Nagasaki, and came near "getting mine," but it's hardly what you'd want.

AS TO biography, full yet brief, all I know about myself is that my paternal ancestors, the Liebes, broken up by the Civil War, came to the mountainous section of East Tennessee from Virginia; and that my maternal ancestors, the Carters, came from New Jersey. I wrote poems (?!) before I was ten years of age. I always wanted to be a

Digitized by Google

writer; I failed in school because I couldn't study for *thinking*. I left my last school by way of a window, tried writing, grew discouraged with my third or fourth turndown, and went to the Philippines.

My adventures, compared to those of fiction, are mild. I don't really know if they are worth relating or not; but I'm going to tell you of the most "thrilling."

IN MARCH, 1900, while stationed with the Signal Corps at San Fernando de la Union, Luzon, P. I. (detached service, from infantry), I found a half-Spaniard, Bernabe de la Cruz, dying from the bite of a centipede (we supposed it to have been a centipede). I brought our American doctor down, and we saved him. Later, while Bernabe was convalescing, I was calling on him, after night, when two natives attacked me—insurgent spies, they were—with bolos. Bernabe caught a blow intended for my neck in his bare hand, almost severing that member. His sister, Alejandra de la Cruz, drove the natives away with an old "pepper-box" revolver. Alejandra afterward wrote her name with mine in the back of a little Bible I carried; and I'm going to let you see her autograph; but I shall be glad to have you return it with the next letter you send me.

AT ODIONGAN, Tablas Island, P. I., May 29, 1900, while taking the town from a part of Luc Ban's army, I became separated from my company and found myself in a much-pathed jungle of elephant-grass. Out of ammunition, with bullets cutting the grass down on all sides, I ran into the biggest Filipino I have ever seen, armed with an old crooked sword. In that narrow path we fought, sword and bayonet, for fifteen minutes. He cut my gun-strap in two, stuck me in the left forearm, and peeled the knuckles on my left hand. A random bullet broke his shoulder, and ended the combat. While I couldn't even knock his hat off because of my own wounds and the grass, I made up for it by giving him the last water I had and the last cigarette.

Afterward, while guarding that man, I let him have his freedom at midnight, to be gone one hour, to see his people, who lived in town. *And he came back.* His name was Balas, and after he was liberated he brought me many a good meal when I needed it badly. Also he offered me his daughter Maria in marriage, which of course I declined—even though she was a brown Venus.

THE nearest to losing my life came in a storm at sea. Forty of us were on the launch *Frankfort*, going from Tablas to Romblon to join the rest of the company. We were in a terrific storm all day. The launch turned upside down, downside up, end for end, was enveloped in water a thousand times. I can not describe that scene. This was in the latter part of 1900; my note-book was soaked in salt water and I can't get a correct date on that account.

TELLING these things afterward sounds very pale. I went through endless hikes, starved, went barefoot for months at a time, and well, anything you can think of.

You will have noted that I carried a little Bible. I wasn't a good man; I did that at the request of the best friend I had on earth. You see I don't want to be a hypocrite. I think I was about the meanest man in the Philippines, to tell you the regrettable truth.

GEORGE WARBURTON LEWIS, writing from Porto Rico, where he is head of the Detective Bureau of Insular Police, greets the Camp-Fire and gives us an account of himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

I have your kind invitation to join Camp-Fire with a little talk about myself, and thank you.

I fear you have handed me a somewhat tangled skein, but whatever success I have achieved in recent years has, as a rule, depended upon my ability to untangle things. If you have not already guessed it, I will tell you that I am the chief of a detective bureau.

NATURALLY, I have not always had this job. There was a time when I walked a policeman's beat. There was another time, a little farther back, when I didn't even have one to walk. (From this you will make your second guess, and again you will not be mistaken:) I was flat broke! In this adventurous freedom from the obligations of worldly servitude I chanced upon—and at once pounced upon—a job in a dairy at twelve dollars a month. My employer was not a bad man, though mentally submerged in things lacteal. He hoped that I would distinguish myself from many itinerant predecessors by staying long enough to learn the business. It looked as though I might. He said by way of inducement that he would raise my pay three dollars a month if I even stayed six months. I hesitated and continued to hesitate. Though I was privileged to eat at the same table with my boss, I omitted in conversation, for diplomatic reasons, any allusion to my travels.

ONE evening at dinner—supper, it was, there—the man of milk handed me a letter. The envelope bore the name of a prosperous magazine, and as the epistle was not discouragingly fat I opened it eagerly. A long-deliberating editor had not only said nice words to me about a contribution I had thought lost, but had proved his sincerity with such an acceptable check that from the moment my employer's eyes alighted upon the figures to the tearless time of my leaving for new pastures—that same evening!—he looked at me askance, as though he feared I might carpetbag away with me a few stray pieces of his silverware! This though I had toiled in perfectly good faith while declining the letters of contract, with a hungering eye forever fixed on the long white road.

UNLIKE Mr. Charles J. Sullivan, whose Camp-Fire talk in the May number I keenly enjoyed, I am unfortunate in not being able to write acceptably from stories told me or from data gathered otherwise than first-hand. Nearly all the *published* stories I have written I have somewhere *lived*. In this instance "somewhere" may be understood to mean almost anywhere, for fate, ably assisted by army transports and other inexpensive forms of government transportation, has generously indulged the wanderlust at the root of my being.

Digitized by Google

HERE'S a summary so tiny it may not offend. Crossed Pacific six times, Atlantic (or sections thereof) eighteen times; seas, gulfs, etc., no account kept. Fought in Philippines and China, as soldier. As policeman, in United States, Panama, Porto Rico, and other American possessions. All fights other than above I have decided to omit, inasmuch as some of them were not accompanied by victory for the author of this chronicle!

"TRAILING the Jungle Man" is so closely related to things that were, and also are, in Panama, that I am not at liberty to speak with freedom about its people. However, there are a number of "old-timers" who will doubtless read this sketch and recognize themselves, in spite of some changes made in their names, as the sturdy Zone policemen who, with the writer of the story, and Beauty (that was her real name, by the way, supposedly because she was so ugly), trailed the fugitive, will-o'-the-wisp Simmons. If I were to hint here that Simmons's "sure-enough" name was Walker, for example, the old-timers might remember still better the particular man-hunt referred to, for there were many.

For the most part the speculations and musings of Jack Lantry, who wandered lost in the virgin jungle of Panama, were in reality mine own—for it was *I* who wandered lost; I, a lieutenant of soldier-policemen, of men who had dared death in other forms and in other lands, and who found me at last in the wee small hours of a starlit morning, no longer able to walk, only to crawl, little dreaming that my "adventure" would sometime grow into a story in a magazine by the same name.

No, I have had to *live* about all the stories I have put across, but I am glad to say that the living has been well worth while.

MANY of you in your letters have mentioned some of the stories in *Adventure* that you particularly liked. Frequently some of you have wondered whether other readers like the same ones you do and some of you have suggested that we get a regular vote from readers in general. All right, it looks like a fine idea.

It will help us know better just what kind of stories our readers like best, and naturally it is our business to get for them what they like best.

We'll take the first vote on the stories of the twelve issues of 1916. A ballot will be printed in the December issue. Once before when we printed a ballot many of you objected to mutilating the magazine by tearing it out, so you needn't do so in this case unless you wish. A sheet of blank paper will do just as well.

All that is necessary are the following things:

(1) Name and address of voter.

(2) List of the ten stories, *given in order of preference,* published in 1916 that you like best.

(3) How many of the 1916 issues have you read?

That's all. Any one may vote. No distinction between serials, novels, novelettes, short stories and articles. Camp-Fire and poems barred. It doesn't matter how many times the same author appears in the list.

Nothing considered unless it was published during 1916. By 1916 we mean the twelve issues with that date printed on them—that is, the January, 1916, to December, 1916, issues inclusive. No votes will be considered until after the December, 1916 issue has appeared.

NOW here's one thing we'll all have to watch. If a man waits till after the December issue to *make out* his list, instead of noting down stories for his list when he first reads them, the result will be that stories in the later issues of the year will be more vivid in his mind than stories in the earlier issues. That, of course, isn't quite a fair test for the earlier stories. It's too late now to report fresh on the earlier stories but we can do so from now on and each of us can right now cast back in his mind or run through his back files and make a list of the ten or fifteen stories he likes best so far. As new issues appear he can change his list accordingly and then, after the December issue has appeared, cut it down to his final list of ten, *given in order of preference,* and mail it in. Mr. Wade and I would like to cast our votes along with the rest of you, if none of you object.

Maybe we can make it a yearly custom and publish each time the list of the ten stories receiving the most votes, with another list of the other stories that showed up well in the voting. Let me know what you think about it, will you?

BY OUR Camp-Fire law, Leland Ward Peck, because of the first story he has given us, rises and introduces himself:

In lieu of more hazardous adventures, as such things go with some of the Camp-Fire clan, I have adventured mildly across our own continent several times. Staying put has never been a virtue with me; since my earliest boyhood the far horizons have held a fascination. School vacations were generally spent far from civilization, for choice the less accessible mountain regions of northern California and Oregon. This desire for new scenes turned me into a hobo one year; took me up and down and across

Digitized by Google

California and into Nevada; taught me to travel "blind," "rods," on top—speed was desired above safety. Freight trains were too slow. Icing refrigerator-cars at the summit of the Sierras with natural ice and driving a header wagon in the blazing heat of the San Joaquin valley are but two of the diversified occupations in which I dabbled—with but a week separating these two jobs, by the way. The softest "picking" I can recall was the season I played semi-pro baseball at a Summer resort.

WHEN the Western Pacific began construction work east of Utah I kept several camps supplied with food and commissary supplies from a headquarters camp in the California hills. When the earthquake started the fire which ravished San Francisco, the tail end of the trembler waked us in our canvas cots away to the east. The words (deleted by censor) the super used as we lay in our little shack and heard our precious water-tank give way were grading-camp classics. You see we had only our own little affairs to worry about then. When regular communication by wire was cut off from San Francisco, our long-distance line to headquarters down on the bay became a link in what was said to be the only wire connecting the burning city with the world. Anyway, we had merely to sit with the receiver to our ears to hear the reports as they flowed past over this roundabout route to Sacramento. Away out there in the hills we had the verbal reports of the disaster before the world got them; before they could be relayed east by telegraph.

THE reconstruction period of San Francisco drew me. For nearly three years I worked for a big Eastern construction company, and then went from San Francisco to New York and Boston for the same organization. My official title was Efficiency Engineer, one that I never felt quite up to, though later I collaborated with my employer in writing rather a big book on the subject and sold several technical articles to the engineering journals.

In an emergency I nursed a car of fabricated steel from Boston to St. Johns, New Brunswick, in the middle of Winter. Every hour that car might stand on a siding and was not moving steadily northward cost money, for a crew of men were waiting for this material. One might here remark that this is not a very good example of efficiency, but I can plead not guilty. The fault lay with the steel people and the railroads between Pittsburgh and Boston. On that trip I committed perjury, bribery, and a number of lesser crimes, but results were what we wanted. My suggestion for an adventure is a caboose-box car-accommodation train trip through New England in the month of January as special hurry-upper for a car of freight.

RETURNING to New York I served an office sentence until I saw an opportunity to join the staff of a coal trade journal and cover eastern Pennsylvania as correspondent. Friend editor in Chicago later sent me to Pittsburgh to open an office, from which point I roamed the bituminous coal-fields of western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and part of Ohio, digging up descriptive articles. Later I became a partner in an advertising agency in Pittsburgh, where I wrote and placed copy for half a dozen lines of business, about some of which I knew—at first—exceedingly little.

BUT the call of the West had been singing in my ears for some time. I dreamed of the old days—fishing, sailing, rugged hunting-camps in the mountains—the great Western out-of-doors. Three years before I had run out to the Coast to get married, and my wife, too, longed for the West. So, after seven years in the East, with only brief trips West, I returned to San Francisco. For a time I traveled through California as envoy for a Boston house, and then, two years ago, edged my name onto the pay-roll of the *Sunset Magazine*, where I am pleased to say it still remains.

Nowadays, when the migration microbe's buzzing becomes particularly disquieting, I pack back into the mountains and work off energy on the trout and deer, on throwing the single diamond, and in hatching up gastronomic surprises for Friend Wife.

EVERY month there is enough to fill Camp-Fire space three times over. Month after month, for one reason and another, the two following letters have been crowded out, but I think you'll find them none the less interesting on that account. One of them takes us back to Algot Lange's claim that there are fifty-foot snakes in Brazil. You will remember that Mr. Ditmars, Curator of Reptiles at the Bronx Zoo in this city, scoffs at the idea of there being snakes of that size anywhere. And several of you have written in to back up Mr. Lange.

I READ Mr. Algot Lange's letter in a back number of the "Camp-Fire" with much interest, as he is going into my old stamping-ground. For eighteen months I traded for rubber on the Madeira River after I had severed connections with the Madeira-Mamore R. R. which is being built by the Brazilian Government.

I have often had dealings with the Paratintins and find they are a much maligned race of people and if one cares to investigate he will find many of the murders attributed to them are done at the instigation of some of the large rubber barons who are trying to discourage the small settler from coming into that section. These Paratintins are the famous "wooden shirt" Indians of Brazil.

MR. DAHNE, a Swiss born in Sao Paulo but who lived in Los Angeles some few years, had a position with the Secretary of Agriculture. Dahne's job was to induce wheat-growing settlers to come into certain places in the Tapagas and Jaci Parana River (another affluent of the Madeira). Mr. Dahne, learning that I could speak some of the Paratintin lingo, secured an audience for me with the Barao do Rio Blanco, the Secretary of Interior, and I was to have a position with the Rondon Exploitation Party, but business called me back to Chicago. I intend to return to Brazil by way of Callao, Tarma, Ucayali River, then overland to the Beni and Mamore, and endeavor to pick up some of my old customers.

I was with Harvey Miller on the first surveying party on the M. & M. R. R. when the infamous ——, at the instigation of some of the rubber barons, attempted to poison him.

Digitized by Google

MR. LANGE will find his sixty-foot snakes in the region he is going. He will also find 8-foot turtles and 30-foot porpoises who blow like a whale. (Wait a few months and hear what Lange says.)

Mr. Lange will find dense jungles with three-foot *sipos* or vines growing in the trees. He will find that with the dense undergrowth he will be unable to see more than 10 feet in any direction, and it is impossible to throw a spear or shoot an arrow more than 5. He will find that, living in the semi-darkness of those awful jungles, those aborgines are very short-sighted, and strong sunlight almost blinds them. I have come upon parties of them who did not seem to discover me until I was within 100 yards of them (this on the water in the jungle; I could almost crawl up and touch them). The worst Mr. Lange will have to contend with is the insects.

HOWARD RINEHART, with the Amazon Cable and Telegraph Company in Manaos (or perhaps now Sauterem), is an old side-kicker of mine and a Paratintin linguist. I've been over this man's-globe eight times in everything from windjammers to submarines, and then I've been on the Wallabee in the Antipodes, trekked the *veldt* and jungle of Africa, crossed the desert of Gobi, and mushed in Alaska, and seen service in three wars in as many years under Uncle Sam's colors. I don't consider I've seen a —— of a lot of adventure.

I don't believe in this soldier-of-fortune business and can't *sabe* it. But from my own experiences gun-running and the fate of Major Davis and those other unfortunates at Ilheos, Brazil, with that harebrained Magali expedition to conquer Brazil, I don't see where the *Gringo* gets anything but the worst of it. I've had plenty of flattering offers but couldn't see 'em.

I have some dunnage in Bridgetown, Barbados, in which reposes the skin of a sucuri sixty-two feet *compremendo*, shot at the plantation of Robert Crawford—or Cushma Bobbie as he is better known—Plantacion Isabel, Rio Pichis, Peru, about half a day's canoe-paddle from the wireless station at Porto Bermudez.

This monster was attacking a woman washing clothes on the river-bank when I with some Indians killed it. I put a load of buckshot in its head and the natives did the rest. I used to think that these large snakes were a myth, but seeing several at close range—when beastly sober—I am ready to credit my own lamps.

IF YOU apply at the offices of the Madeira-Mamore R. R. Co, in New York, they may tell you about the snake that was killed when the preliminary party was surveying near the Jaci Parana.

There came out a chief engineer who got his dope from the same party you wrote me about, and he would froth at the mouth at the mention of these 60-footers, and finally he swore he would "can" the first fellow who sprang another yarn about him.

A fortnight later word came down that a fifty-seven-foot snake was killed up at the front, and away rides the *jefe* on a mule, looking for all the world like the Buddha riding the mule in the Lama Temple at Peking. He was going up to can the whole preliminary party. A few days later he returned. But none of us dared to inquire. But with a good meal under his belt the "big gun" thawed and told us that he had the skin measured with a steel tape and that it was sixty-seven feet long, and that he was sorry he didn't get there when the monster was first killed as he was sure that in drying the skin had shrunk five feet.

Dicky Davis, the war correspondent, was to join this expedition, so one member of the outfit whom I roomed with informs me. I'm betting Mr. Lange comes back with a sixty-footer, and I'll bet he will say that the Paratintins are not so bad after he gets to know them.

Tell that young chap who was inquiring that he has a better chance of getting a commission with Uncle Sam than with the Brazilian Army. I don't see how the impression gets around that the people down there are such a set of boobs. My advice is to stick away. The days of the *muchacho* and the blanket are over with.

The second letter is a stray fragment of world adventure that seems to me to have a little of the quaint and interesting quality of something written by the old voyagers of two hundred years ago:

In the year of 1889 I shipped on a yacht in Hong Kong called the *Peral*, owned by a very wealthy exiled Englishman. We went down to the Strait Settlements; from there to the Island of Borneo. We went up a river called Sarawacka. It is on the west coast of the island, and is a fresh-water river. Runs up about eighty miles, and both sides of river thickly wooded and full of large wild game—panthers the most, and snakes and ring-tail and pig-tail monkeys. We anchored about four miles below the town of Sarawacka, ruled by an Englishman named Raja Brook, a soldier of fortune.

Well, we lowered a boat to land on the river-bank, and we were five in the boat, all armed. When we got close to shore we saw the largest boa constrictor I ever saw or will again. It was squeezing a honey-bear to a pulp, breaking all bones, and gulped it down. We killed the constrictor and skinned it and put it in pickle to send to a museum.

Our next experience was with very large alligators. Now early in the morning they come floating down the river with their mouths open, catching flies. We fired at them, but our leaden bullets bounced off. The bullets will only take effect by hitting them in a soft place between the eyes. Well, we got one on board after one man got a broken wrist and another got a fractured rib from the lash of that terrible tail. The length was twelve feet six inches.

NOW our next place of adventure was at a place on the northwest coast called Bruni. It is a little bay with a small settlement ashore. Now in this place is found the burial place of sixty or seventy Malakka pirates. It was at one time a headquarters of them, and here are the boiler and engine and ironwork of an American yacht that was captured and plundered and crew killed and the vessel burned.

Well, we went ashore and about five hundred yards from the beach was a stream more mud than water. So we went up where a tree was fallen and we walked across. Then about one-half mile was a thick bush and on border of same were coconut

Digitized by Google

trees. Well, we wanted to get some. Now the trees were tall and a nasty climb. We were arguing who should climb up when lo! I saw two big eyes in the darkness of the jungle. I knew what that was, and we all unarmed. We ran and set up a yelling to frighten the animal. Well, we jumped the ditch. Meantime our shipmates ashore opened fire to frighten the animal, but she came on and was shot. It was a female jaguar, almost in litter. If it was not for that she would have caught us. I had a claw of her for many years, until it was stolen from me. I have told this yarn in my plain way and I vouch that it is true. In closing, I may say Borneo is an island of wonders.

LATER on I will try and write you a story of actual facts: that the cleverest Secret Agent of a foreign Government is a man, but a very clever female impersonator, drawing a large salary, provided with expensive jewels, and fooling the people in Washington all the time. Is it any wonder that the U. S. secrets are made public in Europe?—No. C 96.

S. CARLETON is a name that has appeared frequently in the best magazines in the country, yet how many of you know that S. Carleton is a woman? And now that we have one of her stories she hesitates to stand up among so many of us to talk about herself—"There is so little to tell. I've always lived in Canada and do know about the bush—but I'm afraid that's all." That is enough to be proud of; a woman who knows the bush gets our respect.

She writes me from England where she is doing her part in the war-work that falls to men, women and children in these tremendous days. *She* doesn't believe that you'll ever let her sit down with you, but I do. And I know her welcome will be a hearty one. Here is her letter:

I am *afraid!* Do you realize it needs a really brave woman to walk out of the dark woods into the shifting fire-light where men do not want me, and say: "I am here. Look at me." You know best, but *I* don't believe they'll ever let me sit down with them. I can't ask them, but you tell them, if they want to know, that Skunk's Misery country is a real country, Skunk's Misery a real name. Lac Tremblant and its leaden water, and the queer valley where all trails run under rocks is true. The only part in it that is not true is the houses. There are no houses in Skunk's Misery, but one—and that is a story in itself.

PERHAPS—if the Camp-Fire is not bored—you might one day let me tell that. Due north from Lac Tremblant, through the underground trails and the pine trees, is an ordinary hill, dead lonely, miles from any man. In the rock face of it is a door, in cut-stone work built up into a Dutch arch, three feet high perhaps, but broad enough to take the shoulders of a giant. And inside— Well, inside now, are my tin kettle and cup, by the last ashes of my last fire on the queer stone of the fireplace, so that some day I may go back. But there is more than that inside that Skunk's Misery hill.

I've been long in answering you. I was in France when your letter came. And I make reverence to France, I can tell you. We are going to win. We have only just rolled up our sleeves, please God.

LETTER-FRIENDS

Note—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

(35) Robert Crosby, Leon, Kan.

(36) J. Wilson Gandy, Clinton Prison, Dannemora, N. Y.

(37) Hadwen H. Williams, Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, P. I., wants letters from those interested in walking tours.

(38) Mus. Harley C. Thomas, U. S. S. *Kansas*, care Postmaster, New York City.

(39) L. Warren Nichols, 119 Hemenway St., Boston, Mass.

BACK ISSUES OF *ADVENTURE*

Note—A department for our readers' convenience. Our own supply of old issues is exhausted back of 1915; even 1915 is partly gone. Readers report that back *Adventures* can almost never be found at second-hand book-stalls. Practically the only way to get special back copies or to fill out your files is to watch this department for offers made by the few readers who are willing to sell or pass on stray copies or more or less complete files. Our office files are, of course, complete and we do not buy back copies or act as agents for them.

Nov., 1910, to Dec., 1913, except Jan. and Aug., 1913. Good condition, $3—R. B. MUNRO, 111 E. Eagle St., Buffalo, N. Y.

Nov. and Dec., 1910: all 1911, exept Feb., Oct., Nov. and Dec., 15 cents each.—Mrs. PANCOAST, care Mrs. L. M. BOWER, R. D. Box 24, Augusta, Me.

May, 1912: Nov., 1913: 1914 and 1915, complete.—Mrs. ALICE VICKERS, Manor, Texas.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Digitized by Google

A WORD from S. B. H. Hurst on his story in this issue:

On the sixth of December, 1884, the bark *Mexico* was wrecked on the coast of Lancashire, and almost the entire crew of two lifeboats were lost—men who did not get paid for going out in the boat, just simple fishermen. Ever since then I have been trying to write a story that would express the feeling that catastrophe gave me—that is, I have been trying to express that feeling in words, for at that time I could not write. In "The Tide-Mating" I have managed to get the feeling into words. Old *Martha Buckley* died at ninety-two—we were very good friends. *Ted Gillet* you have met before. The girl is the summum bonum of existence—a biological myth, often found in literature, but never in life. She has many faces, many names, and the wise man never tries to describe her because it makes his chest ache to try to.

STILL another rises to introduce himself in accordance with Camp-Fire custom when a man gives us his first story in our magazine. Note that of the thirteen stories in this issue eight are by men who have not before had stories in *Adventure*. In some cases it is the first story they have had in any magazine. It shows that we're keeping out of the rut, are wide open to new blood. And yet, of the others in this issue, three have been giving us stories almost since the magazine was born, and the two others have been with us a year or more.

So we're keeping stable, too, and holding our old writers despite the gradually rising standard we set and despite the many things that tend to end a writer's connection with any given magazine. Harry Couzens, Richard Marsh, Thomas P. Byron, Louis Becke and Captain George B. Boynton are all dead. Perhaps others among those of whom I've lost track. (Only yesterday I got word of the death of a boy of twenty-three who had sold us one story, not yet published.)

W TOWNEND, Major W. Robert Forman, Albert Kinross, Theodore Goodridge Roberts, William Hope Hodgson and others are at the front in Europe—unless some of them too have recently been claimed by death. Mail comes back unclaimed from nearly twenty that I know of. Captain Fritz Duquesne is, as you know, recovering from serious wounds received on the Argentine-Bolivian frontier; Captain George Brydges Rodney is taking part in our army's troubles with Mexico; Captain George A. Schreiner was at last reports still serving as war correspondent in Europe; Algot Lange is lumbering on the lower Amazon and its tributaries. Others are God knows where.

SO THERE are old names lacking as well as present with the new ones in the list of those who give us our stories nowadays. And while I've been talking, Douglas S. Watson, one of our newest, has been ready to shake hands with you. You'll find he was worth waiting for:

My adventures started at an early age. I was seven months old when I made my first trip across the continent from my natal town, New York, to San Francisco. Since then I have traveled over two hundred thousand miles, in America, Mexico, Alaska, Europe, Egypt, India, China and Japan.

My people are Scotch, Irish and English, with a strain of New Amsterdam Dutch, and I am of the eleventh generation born in this country.

In the Fall of 1893, I entered Stanford University with the class of '97, but left after my freshman year, my father's death being the cause. My previous schooling was in Oakland, California, with the exception of a year at St. Paul's, Concord, New Hampshire, and one at the old Boys' High School in San Francisco.

ON LEAVING college I went to Europe, and stayed in France for two years. There I learned to speak French. While in Paris I lived in the Latin Quarter; studied at Calarossi's—I smile now at the artistic aspirations I then had; started to serve an apprenticeship with Chaperon, the great creator of scenery for the Opera; decided that art was not to be my career and, after a year, left Paris for Tours and Loches, where I perfected my French, and incidentally taught some of France's present defenders geography and arithmetic at Bonnet's private school. This in Loches.

I CAME home by way of Egypt, India, China and Japan. Four years ago I revisited the land of the Rising Sun with my wife and two children. Once home, all thought of art vanished and I entered the employ of a San Francisco real-estate firm. Two years later I went into business for myself, and since then real estate has been my trade.

It has often led me far afield; to Tonopah in the first days of the camp; to the Kern River oilfield; to Bakersfield, and the Midway; also to the oilfields of Southern California. I went through the excitement on the West Side; made and lost money dealing in oil lands; drilled many wells, some dry, some just wet, which is as bad, and generally lived the life for a matter of six years.

BUSINESS adventures I have had without number. Personal encounters have been rare. Only once have I looked into the round, black muzzle of a loaded gun, and that was enough. I have been president of a national bank, vice-president of another. In a word, I have packed my last twenty years with busy days, and among them have been many of dark hue when the future looked anything but bright.

Runaways? Yes. One especially. Four horses

Digitized by Google

and a heavy load on a mountain grade; the brakes gave way; three of my companions jumped; a fourth tried to and was killed. I clung to the careening wagon and at the bottom of the steep descent the road curved, we overturned, and I was thrown clear, landing, wet to the middle, in the bed of a creek.

BROKE? Yes. Twice. So I know how the "under dog" feels, I realize how uncertain the tomorrow looks to the man "with blankets," though my flatness never resulted in great personal discomfort. It was a kind of de luxe poverty soon got over, yet its mental stimulus was acute.

I rode (Pullman) out of the oilfields, my purse as flat as the pedal extremity of a splay-foot African. Partner and I talked it over; we decided to hunt for our money where we lost it, in the oil game. We did, but it took time and gritting work to get away with it.

DURING the earthquake in San Francisco I first met dynamite. The acquaintance was thrust upon me. I was endeavoring to rescue the more portable of my cherished possessions, including some necessities, having got my family out of town. It was the third day of the fire, and I drove my big car down the street with a top-heavy load of bedding and Turkish rugs. I rounded a corner on my way to the ferry, and ran "plump" into a mounted artilleryman.

He was a corporal of regulars.

There was no parley. He commandeered my services on the spot, directing me to unload in a vacant lot and to follow him. I did, and some six hundred pounds of dynamite was stowed in the tonneau. Soldiers and officers swarmed the running-boards like bees, and I drove, majestically escorted, though scared to death at the falling brands raining upon us—the top box of powder was open to the sky—toward the curling flames. We had a warm time that day, and that night the fire burned itself out, leaving me my home and an array of debt that staggered.

It was during my dynamite afternoon that I saw a man shot for looting. We were all so excited and numbed by the three days of tension that it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

LOOKS? I played hookey when they gave them out, I guess. I'm five-eight and a pinch, weigh one-eighty fat, one-seventy lean. This Summer I'm going to lose my deckload climbing the Sierras with my son and heir who overtops me, though but fifteen. My hair is getting sparse and losing much of its original blond. The grays almost have it, and my naturally high brow above my gig-lamped blue eyes is creeping slowly toward my crown. I'm forty-one.

I HAVE led a Western life and traveled much; have ground out a living, and a good one at that. I have always wanted to tell what I've seen and done, but never had the time to do so until now. This leaning has been of long standing, and henceforth I'm going to indulge myself.

With my friend, Steve Kendall, I hope to live over again the thrilling days of oil, and I trust you'll take as much pleasure in his company as I do, for he's true-blue, all man, with a heart like an ox. Altogether, he's typical of the spirit of the fast-fading frontier West.

A CHAPTER of the Adventurers' Club is being organized in Seattle by C. Reed Hayden, 108 East 63rd St., Seattle, Wash.

SOME of you will remember letters in "Camp-Fire" a year or so ago from an American in the French Foreign Legion who wrote most interestingly of life at the front, especially on the superiority of hand-grenades over rifles. A bullet through the right lung sent him back to America last spring to recuperate, but he brought with him the military cross of the Legion of Honor, the French War Cross and the distinction of being the first American in fifty years to hold an officer's commission in the French army. A graduate of West Point, he had settled in France and married a Belgian girl.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care U. S. Consul, Para, Brazil. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary. (Five-cent postage in this case.)

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above, except amount of postage.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., $1.00.

National School Camp Ass'n; address its Sec'y, 1 Broadway, New York.

Red-Headed Regiment, Fred C. Adams, East Dorset, Vt.

Gray-Headed Regiment, address Major Guillermo Mac Fergus, care *Adventure*.

Tropical Tramps Regiment, G. G. Lansing, 172 Ridgewood Ave., Ridgewood, N. J.

Marine Corps Gazette, 24 E. 23rd St., New York.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

Digitized by Google

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N. B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

TWO young men, age 25 and 29, desire a good partner under 30 to go to Borneo on a trip. We will secure employment for man accepted, at meeting place which will be in Mass., until we start. We may not start until the Spring of 1917. We are trying to locate a true adventurer and a good partner. No liquor tolerated. Must send photo with answer, which will be returned if postage is enclosed. Employment will pay only $30 per month and found.—Address E. J. MILLER, care *Adventure*.

INFORMATION concerning buried-treasure or unworked mine in the vicinity of Cincinnati, Ohio. The writer is willing to prove his honesty and has the time and inclination to investigate on a percentage basis any such information that may be given him.—Address HARRISON F. LEONARD, Esq., Burnet House, Cincinnati, Ohio.

WANTED by lady returning to America from active service at the front, a few women and men of their families to join her in forming a small congenial colony somewhere in Mexico, or the Western States of U. S. A., Arizona or California. West preferred; Oregon, Washington or East Africa.—Address W 331.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

BOY 18-20 years of age, for a house-boat trip down the Miss. River to New Orleans. Everything furnished by me, but I want a lively chum and friend.—Address E. F. SCHILLING, Coldwater, Kan.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

NOBLE, WASHINGTON ARTHUR (cousin), last heard of in Brownsville, Texas. Dark curly hair, 5 ft. May have enlisted in U. S. Army.—Address JOHN N. LAWRENCE, Naval Hospital, Canacao, P. I.

SCHANE, BEN, supposed to have left New Orleans in Sept., 1915, Key West, Oct. 5th, where he is supposed to have embarked on a filibustering expedition on the *Lucy H* to south coast of Yucatan. Was reported by a man who claims to be his near friend, by name Colonel Suzan; some claim his real name is Cardenus. This man said that Ben had been executed by military court martial by the Carranza government, somewhere near Pueblo.—Address H. K. LE. BECK, care of Abbott Motor Equipment Co., 1790 Broadway, New York City.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

CROWELL, JOHN J., last heard from a year ago at Los Angeles, Calif. Raised in Virginia and Wash., D. C. Dark complected, 5 ft., weight 175 lbs. Would like to find him to settle his father's estate.—Address B. H. BRASHEARS, Agent, W. & O. D. Ry., Hunter, Va.

SOLDIER of "E" Co., 38th Vols., stationed in Lipa, Batangas, P. I., in January, 1900. March or April of the same year he got into trouble burning native shacks. Before he left he gave me a map showing the location of a cache of money he had made in Batangas Providence, P. I. In 1903 this map was burned in a fire with several other papers of which this soldier's name and address was lost. In 1915, accompanied by another soldier, I made an endeavor to locate him, but as I had nothing to go by excepting memory, and as some years have passed, the country has changed and I was unable to find any trace of him.—Address L. W. ANDERSON, Butcher, Q. M. Corps, Ft. Wm. McKinley, P. I.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

DENNIS, LEE A., last heard from at Wichita-Falls, Texas. Was with me in Oklahoma City, Okla., in 1909, and left same year for Shreveport, La. Light complexion, 24 years, 5 ft., 140 lbs. Worked at Aurora Hotel, Okla. Former home in Ill. I have important news for him. —Address L. T. 328.

ALLEN, ROBERT, formerly of Bucyrus, Ohio. Went with me to Calif. 1910. We separated at Hamilton City, Calif. He was contemplating on going to Los Angeles, Calif. 25 years, 145 lbs., 5 ft., dark complexion. Barber by trade. Any information appreciated.—Address L.T. 327.

BRADLEY, GEORGE SHIFFER, last heard of 1874. At that time left Antwerp, Belgium. Sailed for Australia. Son of Joseph J. Bradley of Pittsburg, Pa. Little finger missing on left hand. His only sister inquires. —Address MRS. ANNIE L. PRUDEN, 1922 Sherman St., Denver, Colo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WORKMAN, EDWARD, last heard of in lumber business near Portland, Ore., in 1914. 26 years. Will any one knowing his whereabouts let me hear from them.—Address THOMAS K. STEWART, 1145 Carroll Street, Bklyn, N. Y.

WHEATTON, H. L., last heard from in New Mexico. Dark hair, dark eyes, light complexion; 22 years; weight 145 lbs.; 5 ft.—Address H. J. DAVIS, 224 Maple Avenue, Norfolk, Va.

LOCKWOOD, J. A., formerly in Onaka, S. Dakota, later in lumber camp. Last heard from was sheepherding in Montana. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write.—Address "BUCK," 296 14th Street, Milwaukee, Wis.

NORRIS, JOE L., last heard from in Lima, Peru, Feb., 1914. Left Los Angeles latter part of 1913 for Peru, S. A. Would like to hear from any one knowing of his whereabouts.—Address GEO. ENSENBERGER, Wallace, Idaho.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

WEST, M., wife anxious to hear from you. Children at home are all well. Let me hear from you soon.—Address MAYLA WEST, 362 Weeks St., East Akron, Ohio.

CAREY, CHARLES A., last heard of at Terre Haute, Ind., in 1915. Son would like to hear from him.—Address ELLIS D. CAREY, Battery E., 4th F. A., Corozal, Panama, C. Z.

Digitized by Google

COOKE, JAMES E. (half-brother), formerly of New York and N. Dakota. His sister inquires.—Address ALMA K. SHELDON, Waterville, Maine.

PALMER, GLEN, who recently offered to advise a Boston publisher of a new cure for epilepsy.—Address L. T. 330.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SPEAR, DR., assistant Surgeon (1908-1909) U. S. Navy. Knew you in Portsmouth, N. H. E. and hospital steward, U. S. N.—Address L. T. 329.

CREW of the U. S. Torpedo-Boat Destroyer *Dale*, 1903-1906. I was chief machinist.—Address E. C. STUBBS, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the July or August issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

AVIRETTE, JOHN A.; Berridge, Charles Andrew; Bonner, Fred; Boston, Jim; Braut, Raymond, sailor from Ky.; Buttgenbach, Frederick (Fritz); Canavan, Henry; Carson, J. G. (Jack); Collins, Alfred (Electric); Cook, E. D.; Coy, Alexander Robert and Mollie; Crawford, Geo. H.; Dunlup, Tom, civil engineer; Ebert, Gertrude Viola; Foine, Alf; Foster, Ben; Getchell, Earnest A.; Glennan, William J.; Gray, Curtis; Gutteridge, Edward J. (Bo); Hart, Jack; Heffern, Edward; Jefferson, John; Johnson, Earnest E., Kirby, Ben (Society Ben); Kunze, Arthur, Greenwater; Calif.; Lawrence, Will Jack or "Bill"; Lorraine, Frank; McDonald, Jack; Mahoney, Dan.; Markley, Isohm; Martin, Alfred; Miller, William Addison; Naugler, Owen V.; Piggott, Arthur W.; Prickett, Stone J. (rattlesnake Bill); Ritter, W. M., of Baltimore; Spiegelhalder, Tyler; Stumph, Julius; Summers, Thomas M.; Sweeney, Henry A.; Towne, George H.; Vail, Daniel; Walsh, Billy; White, Hugh; Witfield, Robert: Wiethaler, Fred; Wood, Edward.

MISCELLANEOUS—Red-Headed chief steward who took the *S. S. Berkshire* on her trip to Jacksonville, Fla., from Phila., on Sept. 25; Fla. boys who were out in the *Everglades* with Collecheche and Shapley, 1914-1915; old comrades of the 70's in the Adobe Wall Pocket Cañon and Yellow House fight; F. E. S.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

LAWRENCE STEWART, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, Mrs. Maude Thomas, George A. Blanchard, Hastlar Gal Breath, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293, W 311, W 312. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to those stories mentioned in our ad on page two, the following are scheduled for the October issue, out September third:

TASTE OF THE SALT — *S. B. H. Hurst*

The sea. And a man who goes down to it to find his soul.

ALL WOOL — *W. C. Tuttle*

Your chuckles are bound to explode when you follow the adventures of two shepherds in the cow country.

THIRTY OUNCES — *George L. Catton*

A vivid tale of gold-seekers on the frozen home trail north of Dawson.

THE RETURN — *J. U. Giesy*

She is a newsdealer, he one of the world's wanderers. But he can tell most of you a thing or two about the selling game. He's a live wire. You'll want to meet him.

HER BELOVED ENEMY — *Hapsburg Liebe*

Love amid Tennessee crags. A strong man, a maid of the hills, and a fight you'll never forget.

BROTHERS-IN-ARMS — *David L. MacKaye*

American soldiers in the Philippines, by a man who knows the service.

TO ESCAPE — *Octavus Roy Cohen*

Crooks try to make a getaway from Charleston, S. C. And their job is not an easy one in that open-eyed town.

AN ARIZONA LOCHINVAR — *Frederick Simpich*

No velvet-coated, bespangled bull-fighter can get the best of a husky U. S. cavalry man of the Border Patrol, especially if the affections of a soft-eyed senhorita are at stake.

TENTS — *Maude Radford Warren*

A confident young business woman goes to Europe for an order that will mean millions.

THE REPRISAL — *Patrick Casey*

A flash of the Great War as it was carried to Belgium.

IN THE GRIPS OF THE MINOTAUR — *Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*

Read in this issue the instalment of this strong serial of the ancient world, and you'll not miss the next. This is a tale that is bound to set people talking.

OCTOBER ADVENTURE

Digitized by Google

How Butterick Earns Its Loyal Millions

HALF a century ago, before the first Butterick magazine was founded, women had to depend largely upon word-of-mouth authority and their own common sense in handling some of the most vital problems of home life.

They had little communication with the outside world regarding the great questions of childhood, food, clothing and hygiene.

Then came Butterick with a magazine which for the first time made common knowledge that which before its coming only experts had known.

From that day to this, Butterick has performed a service for women so varied and so intimate that in countless homes it is relied upon as a loyal friend.

In 1907 Butterick started its campaign of "The Homeless Child for the Childless Home." As a result good homes were found for 8,000 little waifs, and many a home was made brighter by a child's smile and a child's love.

When little was known about the Montessori method of teaching, Butterick sent a representative to Italy to write reports for its readers.

Butterick is in large part responsible for laws passed in several states giving women title to their own property and their own children; for the "Widows' Pension" law; and for the Smith-Lever bill, which appropriates millions of dollars for improving farm processes and home life on the farm.

Butterick first made it possible for women to make their own clothing—well, economically, stylishly.

For fifty years Butterick has maintained the recognized leadership in matters relating to clothing and performs more service for women in this regard than any other institution in the world.

In 1915 Butterick began a series of articles on "The House That Grows," showing how one's dwelling may be built in units so that it can grow as the income and the family grow.

Butterick maintains a Household Experiment Station where every new idea in household economics, every new labor-saving device, is given a scientific trial for the benefit of Butterick readers.

The Butterick magazines conduct helpful children's clubs whose membership runs into tens of thousands.

The regular monthly service departments of the Butterick magazines are conducted by qualified experts, and cover the whole field of women's interests.

What Butterick service means to the women of this country is evidenced by the many thousands of letters received every year asking advice on the most intimate problems of their lives. Each letter receives a personal reply from an expert competent to advise.

Half a century of service such as this has earned Butterick publications their power and prestige in American homes.

Butterick

Monthly Magazines

The Delineator

The Designer

The Woman's Magazine

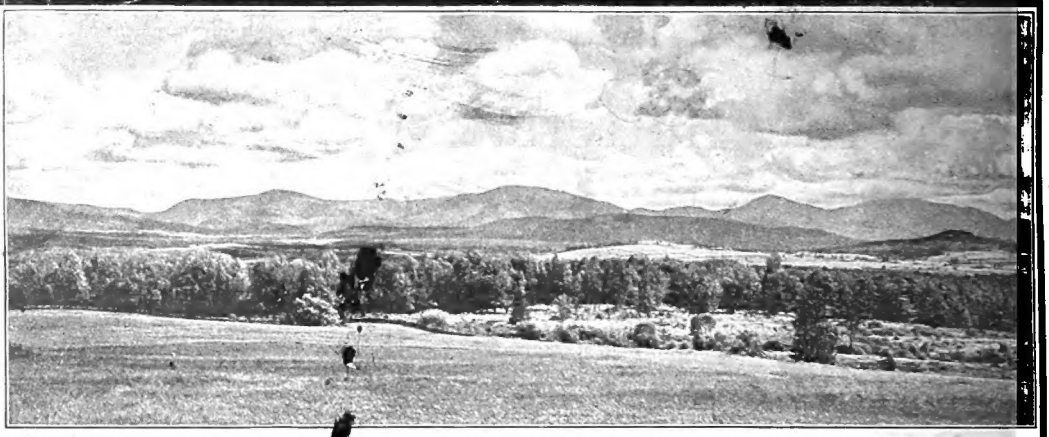
Quarterly Publications

Butterick Quarterly

Standard Quarterly

New Idea Quarterly

Digitized by Google



Copyright Brown Bros.

Get Away, Rest and Play in the Mountains This Month or Next

We'll Pay All the Bills

HUNDREDS of people have enjoyed and financed vacations this Summer through our big Summer Plan. If you need a vacation and also the wherewithal, we'll arrange for you to handle our special offer in your locality. You will be a fully accredited representative of The Ridgway Company, authorized to make this special magazine offer, including two of the best-known American magazines.

Each order taken pays $1.00 in cash. Thirty to fifty orders should be secured in two weeks—each order paying $1.00 profit. The consensus of opinion of those now working is "The greatest Summer money-making plan ever announced—magazines of the highest reputation and value—work dignified and interesting."

Experience in selling, while helpful, is not necessary, for we furnish complete Manual, coach, and help you in every way. No new appointments will be made after September 1st, and the offer itself will be absolutely withdrawn on October 1st.

If you want $30.00 for vacation or other purposes, and will give us a little time, we'll make it possible for you, provided you have the ability, enthusiasm and purpose. Write to-day and enclose two references to The Ridgway Company, Butterick Building, New York City.

Digitized by Google